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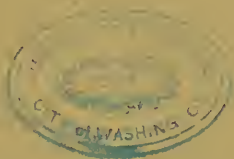




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—“These are my sentiments, weak perhaps, but honest and unbiased; and submitted entirely to the opinion of grave men, well affected to the Constitution of their country, and of experience on what may most promote or hurt it.”

—BURKE'S *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents.*



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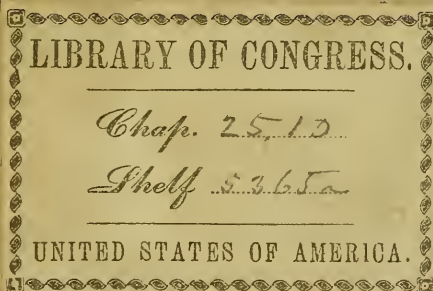
OUR NATIONAL BANE;  
OR,  
THE DRY-ROT IN AMERICAN POLITICS.

A TRACT FOR THE TIMES

*TOUCHING CIVIL SERVICE REFORM.*

BY  
GEORGE L. PRENTISS.

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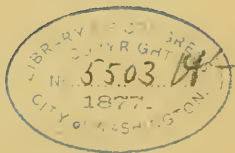
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*The substance of the following tract was first read before a clerical circle of this city and afterwards published in THE TRIBUNE of March 10th. At the suggestion and desire of friends, whose judgment on the subject is worth a great deal more than mine, it is now reprinted—with considerable additions and, as I hope, improved also—in the interest of Civil Service Reform.*

NEW YORK, April 5th, 1877.

G. L. P.



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A TRACT FOR THE TIMES  
TOUCHING  
CIVIL SERVICE REFORM.

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I.

REPUBLICAN INSTITUTIONS LIABLE TO CONSTANT  
ABUSE AND DECAY.

Our free institutions partake of the weakness and evil tendencies that belong to human nature, and, like all things temporal, are exposed to constant abuse and decay. This is plainly implied in the manifold constitutional and legal checks and penalties which mark our whole political system. No officer of the Government stands so high that the law does not warn him to take heed lest he fall. Our Presidents, members of Congress, and judges are men of like passions with rulers, and legislators, and judges in a monarchy or an empire; and so are all other servants of the state. It is an old saying that the corruption of the best is the worst—*corruptio optimi pessima*. No religious error is so terrible as that which turns the truth of God into a lie and the grace of God into licentiousness. No social vice is so debasing as that which pollutes the marriage union; and on the same principle no political evils are so

virulent and degrading as those which come of the prostitution of liberty.

This is the lesson which history and philosophy teach with equal emphasis. We may boast never so loudly of our democratic freedom; there is one and one only way of preserving it unimpaired—namely, by conforming in all things to the divine laws of social order and well-being. These laws are as immutable as that of gravitation; there is with them no respect of persons or of forms of government, and if violated, they are, to say the least of it, quite as sure to avenge themselves upon republican transgressors as upon those of any other name. Civil freedom, then, like individual freedom, can be kept from abuse and decay only by steadfast obedience to the moral laws of the world. But, of course, the more truly free a nation is, so much easier and more natural will it find such obedience, just as the wiser and better any man is, so much more likely will he be to use his liberty aright. To a people, as to an individual, character is of unspeakable value as a protection against temptation and wrong tendencies. And if, in spite of high character, grave error is committed, we may fairly infer that the evil first wrought by stealthy methods and unperceived.

## II.

### ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF POLITICAL ABUSES.

The point just made throws light on the origin and growth of political abuses. "In States," remarks Burke, "there are often some obscure and almost latent causes, things which appear at first view of little moment, on which a very great part of their



prosperity or adversity may essentially depend." Nowhere does human ignorance show itself more impressively. In the best governments it must needs be that offenses come; but nobody can foretell exactly when, or how, or by whom they will come. Omniscience alone could provide for all the endless contingencies and caprices of sovereign power, whether wielded by a single man or by many millions of men. Of one thing, however, we may feel absolutely sure: *wherever a wrong principle is admitted and acted upon, there an abuse will, in due time, make its appearance.* Democracy no more puts a stop to the proper effects of human ignorance, folly, and selfishness than to the changes of the moon, or the ocean tide. Constitutions and laws are designed to protect society against these baleful influences; but in the nature of the case the object can be only partially secured. For the current of human ignorance, folly, and selfishness is always setting strongly—and in times of great public excitement and peril rushes madly like a raging sea—against the appointed barriers and safeguards of social order. There has probably never been a moment—even the most peaceful—in our history when the fundamental law was not more or less violated, both in the letter and the spirit. Even Holy Scripture, the great charter of religious faith and conduct, is but partially carried out in practice in the best ordered Christian community.

The genesis of political abuses and corruption, then, is usually this: Some wrong principle was inadvertently admitted, some point of danger left unguarded, in the organic law, or else a vital mistake has been made in

carrying out one or more of its provisions; both the original and the legislative error having been, perhaps, the result of a slight, casual majority. For a considerable period the evil remains latent, or at least attracts scarcely any notice; but by and by it begins to take shape, to show its real character, and to excite the alarm of thoughtful citizens. Yet the law sustains it; it proves to be invaluable as an instrument of party discipline and advantage; and so the alarm about it is decried or laughed at as altogether needless. When at last the eyes of the community are fairly opened to the mischief, it is found to be a vast political power, intrenched in law and established custom, supported by an army of mercenaries, and ready to bid defiance alike to public opinion and the public conscience.

### III.

#### EXECUTIVE PATRONAGE.

Slavery and the slave power will at once occur as the most impressive illustration in our political annals. Next, and only next to slavery, as a case in point, is Executive patronage; and upon that I shall chiefly dwell. In intrusting the power of appointment to the President, in conjunction with the Senate, the Convention of 1787 were evidently actuated by that spirit of considerate and watchful patriotism which so eminently distinguished them. The probability of any very flagrant abuse of the power seems hardly to have crossed their minds. And in defending this provision of the Constitution *The Federalist* is equally confident. In respect to no subject was the judg-

ment and foresight of that great authority more at fault. This was doubtless owing—in part, at least—to the circumstance that, in the opinion of *The Federalist*, removal from office also required the concurrent action of the Senate. “The consent of that body (says Hamilton, No. 77) would be necessary to displace as well as appoint. A change of the Chief Magistrate, therefore, would not occasion so violent or so general a revolution in the officers of the Government as might be expected, if he was the sole dispenser of offices. Where a man in any station had given satisfactory evidence of his fitness for it, a new President would be restrained from attempting a change in favor of a person more agreeable to him, by the apprehension that the discountenance of the Senate might frustrate the attempt, and bring some degree of discredit upon himself.” Had this construction prevailed, the country would probably have been spared a large portion of the evils which have resulted from Executive patronage. But, unfortunately, the first Congress decided—in the Senate by the casting vote of the Vice-President—that the power of removal belonged exclusively to the President. The argument was that in extreme cases, such, *e. g.*, as the insanity or absconding of a public officer, the interests of the Government might render it absolutely necessary that the power of removal should be exercised while the Senate was not in session. It was contended that, as the Executive (and we must remember that Washington was then President) would only use the power in extraordinary exigencies, no harm was likely to come of it. Mr. Madison, who favored the bill on the ground mentioned, did not

hesitate to declare that, if a President should resort to the power except in extreme cases, or from mere personal motives, he would deserve to be impeached. In other words, he would by such action violate his oath of office.

The decision of the Congress of 1789 was almost certainly wrong. Not a word is written in the Constitution about displacement from office, except in case of impeachment. The removing power is either contained in the appointing power, or it is to be found in the clause: "The executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States." But to derive it from this mere general statement or description is contrary to the spirit and manner of the whole instrument. On any point of constitutional construction the opinion of Mr. Madison is entitled to profound respect; but in the present instance the opinion of Mr. Webster, I venture to think, outweighs even that of Mr. Madison. And it was the judgment of Mr. Webster, formed after long reflection, and expressed with all his wonted deliberation and strength of reasoning, that an erroneous construction had been adopted by the first Congress. Mr. Calhoun, whose opinion is also entitled to uncommon weight, fully concurred with Mr. Webster in holding that the power of removal is part and parcel of the power of appointment, and can be rightfully exercised only "by and with the advice and consent of the Senate"—or in accordance with statutory provisions. He regarded the decision of 1789 as a lasting political calamity.

But if, as these and other eminent statesmen believed, a grave error was committed by the Congress

of 1789 in conceding the power of removal to the President alone, it was yet an error committed in the interest of the Government and without a thought of personal or party advantage. And for a long time the Executive patronage was exercised with such scrupulous care and moderation as to afford scarcely any ground of complaint. Office, from the highest to the lowest, was generally regarded as a public trust, to be bestowed and held for the public good. The prevailing sentiment respecting it was analogous to that with which, happily, the office of a United States Judge is still regarded. Even as late as 1820, when the mischievous four years' law was passed, nobody, probably, discerned in Executive patronage the germ of that anti-republican and ruthless thing, that *monstrum horrendum, ingens, informe, cui lumen ademptum*, which it has since become.

#### IV.

#### THE SPOILS SYSTEM.

The history of the spoils system is a history of national shame and demoralization. The bitterest enemies of republican institutions could have devised no more effectual method of undermining and casting reproach upon them. For in this system are consolidated some of the worst vices of both democratic and despotic governments. While marked by the intense selfishness, party tyranny, disregard of the rights of the minority, vulgar ostracism and proscription for opinion's sake, which are the bane of democracy, it is marked none the less by the adula-

tion of power and man-worship, the craven, fawning temper, the spirit of intrigue, suspicion, and calumny, the suppression of individual freedom, and the insolence of place, which belong to despotism. As the very name imports, its whole animus is that of an army of soldiers gorging themselves with the spoils of victory. The conception is as false as it is infamous and degrading. Public office is not plunder; it is a solemn trust; and both he who appoints to it and he who fills it, are alike bound to have the public good first and chiefly in view. This, to be sure, seems to many an extravaganza of political morality; but it is the principle by which Washington and all the earlier Presidents were governed in dispensing the Executive patronage. And it is the principle to which every President's oath of office solemnly binds him. There can be no doubt that he violates that oath as really, if not as flagrantly, in appointing to public office on merely partisan or personal grounds, as he would in conniving at open defalcations and frauds upon the Government. The Constitution, it is true, does not say in so many words that the President shall nominate men to office with primary and supreme regard to their qualifications for the right performance of its duties. That, however, is clearly implied; that is why the appointing power is vested in him conjointly with the Senate. But according to the spoils system, the public offices of the country are a gigantic party monopoly; no man is entitled to one except on party grounds; no man is permitted to have and to hold one unless he bears the party name, puts on the party collar, and yields implicit obedience to the behests of party lead-



ers. It is nothing else, in a word, than a vast party "ring," of which the President is head-center, members of Congress the directors-in-chief, and politicians by trade the local managers. It is inspired and sustained by three grand motives—personal ambition, pecuniary reward, and party domination. One class desires place for the sake of the honor, the influence, and the opportunity of personal distinction; a far larger class desire place for the sake of the emoluments; while the whole party desire and seek it for their own aggrandizement.

And in the spoils system the interests of all three are mutually cared for, defended, and bound up in a strong chain of moral cause and effect. It is hard to imagine a more perfect or a more effective scheme of political greed and selfishness. And it only needs an entire change of administration to manifest this in a way to astonish the country. The same party has now had control of the Government for so many years that the younger generation can hardly conceive of the wild and disreputable scenes which attended such a change in 1841, '45, '49, '53, '61. In each case, for weeks and months after his inauguration, the new President's name was mixed up with all the office-seeking cliques of his party throughout the Union; the telegraph was largely occupied in reporting what postmaster or other insignificant subordinate had been removed or appointed; Washington City was invaded by a huge army of place-hunters, flushed with the sense of their patriotic services, pushing their "claims," fawning or bullying to get their rewards, and imperilling—in one case, it was said, actually destroying—the life of

the Chief Magistrate by their desperate importunities. It was a spectacle most pitiable and degrading to the manners, morals, and whole manhood of the nation. Heaven forbid it should ever be repeated!

## V.

### STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM.

There are four principal stages in the growth of the spoils system that deserve to be distinctly noted.

(a.) The decision of the Congress of 1789 conceding to the President alone the power of removal. This was the first fatal step, the *proton pseudos* of the system; but it was only a latent germ—a germ that required for its full development a political atmosphere and order of sentiment very different from those which marked the age of Washington and the earlier Presidents.

(b.) The Four Years' law of 1820. Until then the tenure of office was, virtually, during the faithful performance of its duties, the commission, like that of an officer in the army or navy, being unrestricted as to time. By the law of 1820 every commission was to run for four years and then lapse unless renewed. Several disbursing officers had defaulted and the law was designed to meet such cases. But, as not infrequently happens in special and hasty legislation, the real drift and effect of the law was not only to hold disbursing officers of the Government to a stricter accountability by the necessity of having their commissions renewed at the end of every four years—which was, so far, a good thing—but also to change en-



tirely their tenure of office, increase indefinitely their dependence upon mere Executive pleasure, expose them to the greatest temptation to political subserviency and man-worship, and, worse than all, to diminish the responsibility, while it multiplied sevenfold the power, of the President in dispensing the Federal patronage. John Holmes, of Maine, then just admitted as a State of the Union, was, I believe, the author—in part, at least—of the bill. It seems to have excited little, if any, notice or opposition; to have been passed, in fact, almost *sub silentio*. But Mr. Calhoun, then Secretary of War, when he heard of its passage, remarked to a friend that it was “*one of the most dangerous ever passed, and that it would work a great REVOLUTION.*” His prediction has been fulfilled to the letter. The law, which was passed and approved the closing day of the session, May 15, 1820, is entitled: “*An Act to limit the term of office of certain officers therein named and for other purposes.*” The first section is as follows:

“From and after the passing of this act, all district attorneys, collectors of the customs, naval officers and surveyors of the customs, navy agents, receivers of public moneys for lands, registers of the land offices, paymasters in the army, the apothecary-general, the assistant apothecary-general, and the commissary-general of purchases, to be appointed under the laws of the United States, shall be appointed for the term of four years, but shall be removable from office at pleasure.”

The term of office of postmasters was fixed later. The law was retroactive and began to take effect Sept. 30, 1820, upon all officers whose commissions were dated on or before Sept. 30, 1816. Up to the close of Mr. Monroe's second term, and during the

term of Mr. Adams, however, these officers, if their accounts were correct and there was nothing wrong about them, were, in almost every instance, reappointed. As a matter of fact, therefore, no serious harm came of the law until Gen. Jackson's accession to the Presidency in 1829, when its power of mischief as an instrument of personal and party revenge and ambition was suddenly revealed in a manner to startle the whole nation. In 1826, the second year of John Quincy Adams' administration, the subject of Executive patronage attracted much attention, and an elaborate report upon it was made to the Senate by a committee, of which Col. Benton was chairman. That model republican, Nathaniel Macon, of North Carolina; Mr. Van Buren, afterward President; Mr. Hayne, of South Carolina; Mr. Holmes, of Maine; Mr. White, of Tennessee, and Col. Johnson, of Kentucky, afterward Vice-President, were members of this committee. In their report the *possible* evils of Federal patronage are depicted in very vivid colors and with great ability. Much of it would form an excellent tract on Civil Service Reform in our own day. The report traces the overshadowing prerogative of the President in the matter of patronage partly to the action of the Congress of 1789, giving to him alone the power of dismissal, and partly to the Four Years' Appointment law.

"This single act (that of 1820) by vacating almost the entire civil list, once in every period of a Presidential term, places more offices at the command of the President than were known to the Constitution at the time of its adoption."

Having shown that the power and influence of Federal patronage, contrary to the argument of *The*

*Federalist*, is altogether an overmatch for the power and influence of State patronage, the report proceeds:

“The whole of this great power will center in the President. The King of England is the ‘fountain of honor;’ the President of the United States is the source of patronage. He presides over the entire system of Federal appointments, jobs, and contracts. He has power over the ‘support’ of the individuals who administer the system. He makes and unmakes them. He chooses from the circle of his friends and supporters, and may dismiss them; and upon all the principles of human actions, *will* dismiss them, as often as they disappoint his expectations. His spirit will animate their actions in all the elections to State and Federal offices. There may be exceptions, but the truth of a general rule is proved by the exceptions. The intended check and control of the Senate, without new constitutional or statutory provisions, will cease to operate. Patronage will penetrate this body, subdue its capacity of resistance, chain it to the car of power, and enable the President to rule as easily, and much more securely, with than without the nominal check of the Senate. We must then look forward to the time when the principle of public action will be open and avowed; *the President wants my vote, and I want his patronage; I will vote as he wishes, and he will give me the office I wish for.* What will this be but the government of one man?”

If read in view of the fact that Mr. Adams dismissed but two officers during his entire term, and especially in view of the literal fulfillment of so many of its predictions under the next administration, of which its author, Col. Benton, was a trusted leader, this Report is one of the most striking and suggestive documents ever presented to the Senate of the United States.

## VI.

## "TO THE VICTORS BELONG THE SPOILS."

(c.) We come now to the third stage in the growth of this odious system—namely, the open avowal and adoption of the principle that *to the victors belong the spoils*. The avowal, it is said, was first made on the floor of the United States Senate, in 1832, by Mr. William H. Marcy, afterward so distinguished as Governor of New York, and as a member of the Cabinets of Presidents Polk and Pierce. When Mr. Marcy condensed into this epigrammatic saying the new theory of Executive patronage, he little dreamed, probably, that it was destined to live so long after he himself had turned to dust, or that it would give name and character to a system fraught with so much evil to the country. He meant it, no doubt, simply as the bold utterance of a widespread and dominant, though as yet somewhat vague, sentiment of the party in power. And the moment was singularly opportune for such an avowal. The practice which it was intended to justify, although a great innovation and a great shock to public opinion, had been forced upon the country by storm, as it were, and was already in the full tide of successful experiment. It was the time when "*Hurrah for Jackson!*"—a political war-cry, whose echoes have hardly yet died away in some of the old Democratic fastnesses—resounded throughout the land, outvoicing the noisy waves of the sea with its multitudinous roar. "Old Hickory," as the Democracy loved to call their idol-

ized chieftain, seemed predestinated to the task of inaugurating the revolutionary policy. The name of Andrew Jackson will ever be held in honored and grateful remembrance by the American people; for he was a national hero, and at a most critical period in the history of the Union, he showed himself a great-hearted patriot. But it can not be denied that he was a man of very strong and somewhat vindictive passions; or that as a popular leader, he was easily swayed by other influences than those of political wisdom and justice.

No President, before or since, surpassed him in strength of nerve, or in the obstinate courage of his opinions; none ever equalled him in the dauntless assurance with which he interpreted the Constitution "as he understood it," or the unflinching pluck with which he "took the responsibility" of carrying out his own views of its meaning. It was no light matter to oppose him, or stand in the way of his favorite plans; and those who incurred his wrath had to meet a frown, which few could endure unappalled. As was once said of him, he had but to whistle, and his followers, like those of Roderick Dhu, started up in every direction, ready and eager to perform his bidding.

Instant from copse and heath arose  
Bonnets and spears and bended bows.

It required civilians of the grandest type and of a courage not inferior to his own, to withstand the onset and terror of his head-strong will. Fortunately, Clay, Webster, and Calhoun—not to mention others—were men of just this stamp.

Only in such a time of intense party conflict and

animosity, and only under a President like Gen. Jackson, could the spoils system have been so suddenly and firmly established. Of course, the leaders of his party, several of them signers of the report on Executive patronage already referred to, counselled and coöperated with him, and stoutly defended his course, both in Congress and before the people, as well as through the press.

## VII.

DID GEN. JACKSON INAUGURATE THE SPOILS SYSTEM?

—MR. WEBSTER'S TESTIMONY.

It has sometimes been denied that Gen. Jackson first put in practice the spoils system. But I see not on what ground. A few simple statistics ought, as it seems to me, to settle the question. During the eight years of Washington's administration, he removed only nine officers, and in every instance for cause. The elder Adams dismissed ten during his term. Mr. Jefferson, during his eight years, only removed forty-two, although a large portion of the office-holders were strongly opposed to his election. Mr. Madison, during his eight years, dismissed but five officers. Mr. Monroe, during his two terms, only nine; John Quincy Adams, as I have said, dismissed but two. Gen. Jackson, during the first year of his Presidency, removed 230 officers; in other words, he removed about three times as many in one year as all his predecessors had dismissed in forty years. Before the close of his first term, some 2,000 removals and ap-



pointments had been made, according to an estimate of Mr. Webster.

“As far as I remember [I quote from Mr. Webster’s speech before the National Republican Convention at Worcester, Oct. 12, 1832,] as far as I remember, sir, after the early part of Mr. Jefferson’s administration, hardly an instance of removal occurred for nearly thirty years. If there were any instances, they were few. But at the commencement of the present administration, the precedent of these previous cases was seized on, and a *system, a regular plan of government*, a well-considered scheme for the maintenance of party power by the patronage of office, and this patronage to be created by general removal, was adopted and has been carried into full operation.”

The following passage from the same speech gives a graphic picture of the early working of the system, and of the feeling with which it was then regarded by wise and thoughtful citizens like Mr. Webster :

“No worth, public or private—no service, civil or military, was of power to resist the relentless greediness of proscription. Soldiers of the late war, soldiers of the revolutionary war, the very contemporaries of the independence of the country, all lost their situations. No office was too high, and none too low ; for *office* was the spoil, and ‘*all the spoils,*’ it is said, ‘belong to the *victors.*’ If a man holding an office necessary for his daily support had presented himself covered with the scars of wounds received in every battle, from Bunker Hill to Yorktown, these would not have protected him against this reckless rapacity. Nay, sir, if Warren himself had been among the living, and had possessed any office under Government, high or low, he would not have been suffered to hold it a single hour, unless he could show that he had strictly complied with the party statutes, and had put a well-marked party collar round his neck. Look, sir, to the case of the late venerable Major Melville. He was a personification of the spirit of 1776, one of the earliest to venture in the cause of liberty. He was of the Tea Party ; one of the very first to expose himself to British power. And his whole life was consonant

with this—its beginning. Always ardent in the cause of liberty ; always a zealous friend of his country ; always acting with the party which he supposed cherished the genuine republican spirit most fervently ; always estimable and respectable in private life, he seemed armed against this miserable petty tyranny of party as far as man could be. But he felt its blow, and he fell. . . . When his successor was nominated to the Senate, and the Senate were informed who had been removed to make way for that nomination, its members were struck with horror. . . . Mr. President, as far as I know, there is no civilized country on earth in which, on a change of rulers, there is such an *inquisition for spoil* as we have witnessed in this free republic. When, sir, did any British minister, Whig or Tory, ever make such an inquest ? When did he ever go down to low-water mark, to make an ousting of tide-waters ? When did he ever take away the daily bread of weighers, and gaugers, and measurers ? When did he ever go into the villages to disturb the little post-offices, the mail contracts, and everything else in the remotest degree connected with Government ? Sir, a British minister who should do this, and should afterwards show his head in a British House of Commons, would be received by a universal hiss."

Before the close of his second term, either by dismissals outright, or by filling with his own adherents all vacancies occasioned by the expiration of commissions under the Four Years' law, Gen. Jackson had made a pretty "clean sweep" of Federal officers throughout the country. It was called a "rotation," but was, in fact, a revolution, perfect and entire, in the civil service of the nation.

And yet even the iron will and imperious, overbearing temper of Gen. Jackson, backed by his immense popularity, could not establish the new system without encountering, as we have seen, the most strenuous opposition. At every step it was resisted by some of the greatest statesmen of the country.



They pointed out its anti-republican and dangerous character with extraordinary earnestness and depth of conviction. Its corrupting influence was for years the burden of indignant protest and denunciation by the Whig party in their national platforms, in the resolutions of their State conventions, in the speeches of their leaders, and in the Whig press all over the land. Various attempts were made also in Congress to stop the contagion. In 1835 a long and very able report on the subject was made to the Senate by Mr. Calhoun. At the same time a bill was introduced by him to repeal the Four Years' law of 1820, and to regulate the power of removal. Still conceding to the President this power, it required that in all nominations made to the Senate to fill vacancies occasioned by its exercise, he should state the fact of the removal, and also the reasons for it. The bill passed the Senate by a large majority—31 to 16; but failed in the House. While this bill was pending, Mr. Webster made his characteristic speech on the appointing and removing power. Henry Clay, Silas Wright, William C. Preston, Col. Benton, James Buchanan, Samuel L. Southard, John M. Clayton, Ether Shepley, and other eminent Senators, also took part in the discussion, which ran on day after day. There were political giants in the Senate in those days, and this debate showed their strength.

#### MR. CALHOUN'S POSITION.

But Mr. Calhoun surpassed them all—if not in the ability, yet—in the glowing energy and zeal with which he spoke. No one, indeed, can read his report and

his various speeches on this subject without admiring their manly boldness, independence, and patriotic spirit. If in his theory of the Constitution as a compact between sovereign States and in his pro-slavery doctrines, Mr. Calhoun was the great political heresiarch of the nation, in reference to the whole matter of civil service reform he was one of the wisest, purest, and most high-minded statesmen the country has produced. No man ever denounced the spoils system in terms of more unmeasured severity, or pointed out its evils and warned the people against its fatal consequences with nobler fidelity to the highest principles of civic duty. "If you do not put it down," said he, "it will put YOU down." His letter to Dr. Channing, first published a few weeks ago in *The Tribune*, was written just after his report to the Senate, and is a striking comment upon it, as well as a beautiful testimony to the unity of patriotic sentiment and the love of peace, which, in spite of their sharp antagonism on slavery and the nature of the Union, marked those illustrious men. After thanking Dr. Channing for his sermon on war, Mr. Calhoun adds:

"Permit me, in return, to present you with my report on Executive patronage. Though the two subjects are apparently entirely disconnected, he who will look below the surface will see a most intimate relation between them. We would have few wars if there did not exist in every community a body, separate from the rest of the community, who have a direct interest in war. That body is the great and influential corps of office-holders and office-seekers, contractors, agents, jobbers, speculators, to whom war brings an abundant harvest. This corps, as you will see by the report, is already very formidable, and will be

ready to plunge the country into war either to prevent reform or to increase their gain."

I can not refrain from quoting a few more of the great South Carolinian's terse and ringing utterances on this question. For many years, as we learn from his own lips, reform in the civil service was uppermost in his thoughts and a leading object of his public life.

The following is from one of his speeches on the bill to repeal the Four Years' law :

"Let us not be deceived by names. The power in question is too great for the Chief Magistrate of a free state. It is in its nature an imperial power, and if he be permitted to exercise it, his authority must become as absolute as that of the autocrat of all the Russias. To give him the power to dismiss at his will and pleasure, without limitation or control, is to give him an absolute and unlimited control over the subsistence of almost all who hold office under Government. Let him have the power, and the sixty thousand who now hold employment under Government would become dependent upon him for the means of existence. Of this vast multitude I may venture to assert, that there are very few whose subsistence does not, more or less, depend upon their public employment. Who does not see that a power so unlimited and despotic over this great and powerful corps must tend to corrupt and debase those who compose it, and to convert them into the supple and willing instruments of him who wields it? We already experience its corroding operation. It is in vain to attempt to deny the charge. I have marked the progress of this base and servile spirit in a thousand instances within the last few years, and have seen the spirit of independent men, holding office, sink under the dread of this fearful power; too honest and too firm to become the instruments or flatterers of power, yet too prudent, with all the consequences before them, to whisper disapprobation of what in their hearts they condemn. Let the present state of things continue—let it be understood that none are to acquire

the public honors or to obtain them but by flattery and base compliance, and in a few generations the American character will become utterly corrupt and debased. . . . We have lost all sensibility ; we have become callous and hardened under the operation of these deleterious practices and principles, which characterize the times. What a few years since would have shocked and roused the whole community, is now scarcely perceived or felt. Then the dismissal of a few inconsiderable officers, on party grounds as was supposed, was followed by a general burst of indignation ; but now the dismissal of thousands, when it is openly avowed that the public offices are the 'spoils of the victors,' produces scarcely a sensation. It passes as an ordinary event."

These extracts indicate the character and tone of his report to the Senate and of his speeches in its defense in 1835. Eleven years after, in 1846, he recurred to the subject in the same temper. The following weighty sentences are from the closing part of his speech :

"A large mass of society enter into politics as a mere mode of obtaining a livelihood. When I affirm that already as many persons live upon the expenditures of this Government [this, let it be remembered, was more than thirty years ago !] as the half of the great population engaged in the cultivation of the cotton lands, the extent of the evil may be imagined. . . . But this is not all. Put the half of the income of the cotton property into a lottery, to be drawn every four years ; so many men will go into that lottery in hopes of drawing a prize, that when the victory is achieved, but one in forty can be rewarded. What is the result ? The thirty-nine disappointed, and who fought only for the spoils, turn round in process of time—when political degeneracy takes place, as it will—to the other side, and seek the next turn of the wheel when another lottery is drawn. Thus they go on. Can any wise man—can any patriotic man—can any genuine friend of human liberty, look at such a spectacle without the most poignant regret ? He must be little informed indeed in politics who does

not know all this ; and knowing all this, he will be asserting one of the most untrue and monstrous propositions on the face of God's earth, who says that this is a 'popular doctrine.' What ! 'a popular doctrine ?' It is the very reverse. It is the doctrine to create a king and to annihilate liberty. . . . The Presidential election is no longer a struggle for great principles, but only a great struggle as to who shall have the spoils of office. Look at the machinery ! A convention nominates the President—in which, not unfrequently, many of the representatives of the States join in a general understanding to divide the offices among themselves and their friends. And thus they make a President, who has no voice at all in the selection of officers ! These things are known ; and I say it is surprising that, being known, gentlemen who advocate the opposite doctrine assume to be democratic. No. The democratic doctrine is precisely the reverse of what they affect to teach. It goes against patronage and influence, and gives no more patronage than what the strict necessity of the case requires. Patronage, wisely and judiciously dispensed on the part of the Executive, may have a salutary effect in giving concentration and strength to the Government ; but this wholesale traffic in public offices for party purposes is wholly pernicious and destructive of popular rights. Properly applied, the policy is admirable ; but as soon as the Government becomes the mere creature of seekers of office, your free institutions are nearly at an end. In this matter I have been uniform and sincere—whether right or wrong, time will disclose."

"I would no more permit the Chief Magistrate of a country to displace those who are charged with mere ministerial offices, without cause, on party grounds, than I would permit him to divest them of their freeholds ; the power to divest them of the one is calculated to make them as servile and dependent as the power to divest them of the other."

One more passage shall suffice. It occurs in his "Discourse on Government," written, probably, in 1848-49, only a year or two before his death :

"Another effect (namely, of the decision of the Congress of 1789) has been to engender the most corrupting, loathsome, and

dangerous disease that can infect a popular government ; I mean that known by the name of '*the spoils.*' It is a disease easily contracted under all forms of government ; hard to prevent, and most difficult to cure, when contracted ; but of all the forms of government, it is, by far, the most fatal in those of a popular character. The decision which left the President free to exercise this mighty power according to his will and pleasure, uncontrolled and unregulated by Congress, scattered broadcast the seeds of this dangerous disease throughout the whole system."

## VIII.

### THE SYSTEM UNDER PRESIDENT VAN BUREN.

Upon the accession of Mr. Van Buren to the Presidency, the new system had been in operation long enough to bear fruit after its kind ; and this fruit now began to appear all over the country as full of deadly poison. The history of the defalcations of public officers during his term and the second term of Gen. Jackson, is mostly unknown to the present generation ; but it surpasses, if possible, even that of the Whisky Ring as a lesson in civil service reform. The shameful story is told in Document 297, furnished the House of Representatives by the Secretary of the Treasury, March 30, 1838. It contains two hundred and sixty letters to defaulting collectors and receivers. My brother, in a speech in the House of Representatives, called it, very justly, "a fragment of chaos." "It is," said he, "a moral, political, and literary curiosity. If you are a laughing philosopher you will find in it ample food for mirth ; if you belong to the other school you can not but weep at the folly and imbecility it exhibits. Its contents are as strange



as the 'hell broth' that boiled and bubbled in the witches' cauldron."

Swartwout, the collector of this port, was the largest defaulter. His embezzlements were immense, and had been carried on, undetected, for a series of years. On being found out, he was delivered over to the tender mercies of the opposition in Congress; the Administration, it was charged, dropping him as the bear, when hotly pursued, drops one of her cubs, for the purpose of distracting the attention of the hunter, and so escaping with the rest of her young. His case was one of scores, and, although the largest, was by no means the most flagitious. One land officer's accounts exhibited his defalcations as of some \$50,000 or more in money. But in addition to this, being a "land rat" also, he had, by virtue of his office, transferred to himself, without even paying for it a single dollar, some 28,000 acres of the public domain; enough for a German principality! And what is stranger still, his pretended title was actually recognized by the Secretary of the Treasury and portions of the land were being sold by officers of the Government as the property of the defaulter.

No such document, I suppose, has ever, before or since, appeared in the records of the national Legislature. These shocking defalcations were made the most of by the Whigs and contributed not a little to the sweeping political revolution of 1840, when "Tippecanoe and Tyler too" were elected. Had anybody predicted in 1837-40 that in the event of their gaining power the Whig party would go back on all their teaching about the necessity of civil service reform, and would at once adopt and put in practice

the very abuse which they had so bravely denounced, thousands of good men among them would have exclaimed with Hazael, "*But what! is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?*" And yet it is a matter of plain record that the zeal of the Whigs for reform on this question soon melted into thin air, and but for the sudden death of President Harrison few Democratic office-holders would probably have long retained their places. The "spoils" poison had already infected the whole country, engendering a frantic lust of office which laughed to scorn all thought of party consistency. Suffice it to say, that from the Presidency of Gen. Jackson to that of Gen. Grant, the vile system has been practiced alike by both parties, in state and nation, and is to-day the ruling policy of the country.

Gen. Grant did indeed, at one time, make an earnest effort to abolish it; but he was so thwarted and opposed by leading politicians of the Republican party, and so feebly seconded even by public opinion, that at length he gave up the attempt in despair. He found out that he had undertaken a harder task than the capture of Vicksburg, or the march through the Wilderness. But he deserves no little praise for his honest endeavors.

The blame of the spoils system, then, can be fairly imputed neither to the Democrats nor to the Republicans exclusively. If the Democrats first established the hateful policy, the Whigs and then the Republicans freely accepted and adopted it as their own. And in each case it was done in violation of plighted faith. In each case it was done by trampling under foot solemn professions and pledges, which had been pro-



fusely made, and patriotic hopes, which had been widely excited among the people, while the canvass was going on. Both parties, therefore, are deeply involved in the guilt, and ought to humble themselves on account of it, asking pardon of God and their injured country, and joining hands in bringing forth fruit meet for repentance. They could not do a wiser and better thing, or one that would bring them greater and more lasting honor.

It seems to me only just to add, that the abuse was almost sure to come, sooner or later; its germs were latent already in the decision of the Congress of 1789 and the Four Years' law of 1820, not to say in human nature; and the Presidency of Gen. Jackson was, therefore, the occasion rather than the real cause of its sudden and rank development.

## IX.

### CONGRESSIONAL PATRONAGE.

(*d.*) I come now to the fourth and final stage in the progress of the system—namely, the transfer of the Executive patronage, or at least a large portion of it, from the President to members of Congress. The transfer was made gradually, but has now become an established custom—the unwritten law, indeed, of party politics. It seems to be based upon several grounds. (1). And first, that of *locality*. A certain portion of the Federal patronage, for example, is dispensed in the State of Maine at large; and the State of Maine, in the persons of her Senators in Congress, is fairly entitled, it is alleged, to say how this patronage

shall be dispensed. Another and smaller portion is dispensed in each Congressional district of Maine, and the national Representative of that district is entitled, under certain restrictions, to wield it. A vastly larger portion of the Federal patronage is to be dispensed, on the same principle, in and by the State of New York. Another portion goes to Illinois; another to Nebraska; another far away to that State upon which "Cronin" is just now fixing all eyes; another to California, and so on until the almost interminable circuit of the Union is completed.

This principle of locality is regarded as something very sacred and inviolable. There is thought to be special grace in it, more particularly when embodied in a United States Senator. It is guarded with a jealous vigilance not unlike that with which a Turk guards the privacy of his harem. Let a member of Congress from an Eastern State, for example, presume, in the interest of the Government, to speak a word touching the impropriety of appointing, reappointing, or dismissing a public officer in a Western State; and—no matter how truthfully he speaks, no matter if he speak at the urgent request of leading citizens of the community in the midst of which and for whose benefit the office exists—the chances are that he will be quickly given to understand, if not told sharply to his face, that he had better "mind his own business." And just so if the case supposed were reversed. Eastern politicians are, doubtless, quite as exacting and quite as touchy in this matter as those from the farthest West. In truth, whether from the East or the West, the North or the South, one can hardly deny that they do well to be angry at any real

interference with their right of local nomination or appointment, if such a right really belongs to them. Have they the right? is the previous and main question. Such is the operation of the geographical rule. It tends to generate a narrow, selfish, and intolerant temper in the appointment of public officers—a temper most unbecoming the character of a great and free government. But even admitting that a State is entitled to control the Federal patronage within its own bounds, how does it come to pass that this power is chiefly in the hands of two men?

(2). This suggests another ground of the practice, that of *incidental prerogative*, as it might, perhaps, not inaptly be called. It is assumed that the disposal of Federal patronage is a power incident to the Senatorial office (for the sake of brevity I confine myself to this), and one of its natural perquisites, so to say. The two Senators from New York, according to this view, when elected to their exalted positions, became at the same time clothed with the prerogative of saying who shall, and who shall not, fill the most important Federal offices in the State;—some of these offices being also among the most important in the Union.

(3). A third ground upon which Congressional patronage bases itself, is that of *practical necessity*. Neither the President nor heads of departments, it is said, can possibly know who are the right men for the almost numberless places of trust and honor throughout the country. Perhaps not one of them has ever set foot in half of the States of the Union. They must rely upon testimony and advice in making a large majority of their appointments; and it is better, on the whole, that they should follow the tes-

timony and advice of members of Congress who represent the States and districts concerned.

Such, as I understand, are some of the reasons for the transfer of so large a portion of Federal patronage to members of Congress. But they appear to me utterly insufficient to justify it. As to the first, it is enough to say that, while Federal patronage is dispensed, as a matter of course, in different parts of the country, it is dispensed for their common advantage; it is dispensed in order to the due administration and execution of the laws, in order to protect the rights and liberties of the people, and to promote the general welfare. The appointment of good and faithful agents of the Government for this high service is the first and chief thing; the exercise of what is called patronage is merely a needful means to secure such agents. And it is indispensable to this end that the power and responsibility should be where the Constitution places it, in the general Government, not in the States. But even if it were lodged in the States, it would rightly belong to, and should be wielded by, the people on the spot, not by their servants, whom they have sent to Washington City for a very different purpose. I do not mean to deny that the local principle is to be considered; a wise government will always take it into account. But I do think that in its application the principle is sometimes pushed to a foolish extreme, and that the pretensions based upon it are often very childish and ridiculous. It has come to be almost as difficult a matter for the President himself to adjust and satisfy these conflicting claims, even in the appointment of members of his own Cabinet, or of judges of the Supreme Court and of

foreign ministers, as to settle a Parish will case, or to solve the most complicated problems of Life Insurance. The tendency of the unreasonable and superstitious notions on this point, has been, and always will be, to belittle and emasculate the public service. At all events, the claims of locality afford no proper justification of the transfer of Executive patronage to members of Congress.

And the second ground assigned for it is equally baseless. The Senatorial office is clothed with no such incidental prerogative. No such political perquisites belong to it. The whole thing is a pure assumption, sustained, it is true, by evil custom and plausible fallacies; but the Constitution lends it no sanction or countenance whatever. That gives the power of appointment to the President and the Senate as an executive body—not to the individual Senators. And it gives no share of the power to the House of Representatives. The existing practice, therefore, has wrought a virtual change in the Organic Law. It is a gross two-fold breach of the Constitution; it usurps one of the most important executive functions, and it does so not only in defiance of a general principle, but of an express constitutional provision, viz.: That if the appointing power in the case of “inferior officers of the United States” is taken from the President and Senate, then it shall be vested in the President alone, or in the courts of law, or in the heads of departments. Congress may distribute the appointing power in the ways here indicated; it may also, at its discretion, fix the tenure of office—except in the case of United States judges—determine the manner of dismissal,

define the duties of each officer—in a word, *regulate* the whole appointing and removing power of the Government; but for all that, it has no more right to vest this power in its own members, than it has to do so in the case of foreign ministers, or judges of the Supreme Court. Supposing, however, that the Senatorial office is clothed with the prerogative of dictating the principal Federal appointments in the State at large; how happens this prerogative in so many cases to be exercised by one only of the Senators? and in other cases by neither of them?

Where, for example, during the past two years, did the eminent Republican senator from New York get the right to dictate the Senatorial appointments in this State, while the eminent and equally worthy Democratic senator was as helpless in the matter as if he had represented little Delaware, instead of the great Empire State? Is he not as patriotic and as well qualified to name good and true men for the public service as his brilliant colleague? Do not the Constitution and the laws of the land invest him with exactly the same rights and privileges, and impose on him the same duties? There can be, it seems to me, only one candid answer to these questions. Why, then, does one Senator, and he representing the political sentiments of a minority of the people, absorb into himself so large a portion of the Federal patronage, while the other Senator is not allowed—unless as a personal favor or courtesy—to name a custom-house gauger, or a tide-waiter? No other reason for this strange anomaly can be assigned, than that of party monopoly and proscription.

And is that the genuine outcome of a century of



American independence and nearly ninety years of civil freedom, culture, and progress under the Constitution of the United States? I say nothing now of the manner and apparent motives of too many of these Senatorial appointments, not in New York alone, but all over the Union, especially in some of the Southern States; I say nothing of the bones of sharp contention they not infrequently become, or of the bitter rivalries, intrigues, suspicions, and calumnies they are the occasion of; I say nothing of the partisan "strikers," blackmailers, detectives, and other detestable characters, more or less mixed up with them; but taking the system at its best estate, and in its most respectable manifestations, I ask again, if all this is a genuine product and fair sample of a century of American civilization, self-government, and political progress? If so, alas! for the future of republican institutions.

As to the third ground on which Congressional patronage is justified—namely, that of practical necessity, but few words are needful. It stands to reason, that in performing so grave a duty as the selection of the public servants—of those upon whom will devolve the task of conducting, honestly and faithfully, the varied branches of public business—the President, and all others entrusted with appointing power, will seek the best sources of knowledge, and thankfully receive information from any and every accessible quarter. As a matter of propriety, if not of necessity, they will often take counsel of members of Congress, and, if these are upright, true men, will attach much weight to their opinion and recommendation. And members of Congress, on their part, would be highly blameworthy if, when solicited, they did not

gladly give their counsel and information, not for reward, but as a grateful debt they owe their constituents and their country. To give their best advice, indeed, is a constitutional duty of Senators whenever they meet in executive session. It is to be taken for granted, that members of Congress—especially old members—will often be able to render very valuable service of this sort. But, then, how many other citizens are there in every town, and district, and State, who can do it equally well, oftentimes much better?

It is not, after all, so hard to obtain trustworthy information and counsel, if a man has the good sense and tact to know where to seek and how to elicit and use them. These valuable treasures are not stored away in Congressional bosoms alone. There are a great many thousands of sensible, upright, and patriotic men outside of Washington City, and yet in easy communication with it. For we must consider that by means of the railroad, the telegraph, and the daily press, with its wonder-working power of gathering knowledge, the most distant States of the Union are brought within speaking distance of the national Capital; and it is far easier to-day for Gen. Grant to get quick and accurate information about the leading citizens of California, or Oregon, and what is going on in those remote States, than it was for President Washington, in 1789, to obtain such information about New Hampshire or Georgia. Congressional aid and guidance in the exercise of the appointing power are, I am inclined to think, far less indispensable than they were seventy-five or eighty years ago. Where one entirely unsuitable or bad man is nominated by



the President for an important office through sheer inability to obtain the needful information respecting him, half a dozen unsuitable or bad men are probably appointed to important offices by appeals to the good nature, prejudices, and selfish ambition of members of Congress, or under the pressure of unfulfilled pledges and promises. Where the office-seeker is a feudatory or retainer of some Senatorial baron, it is not only hard, but dangerous to turn a deaf ear to his claims.

## X.

### POSITION OF GOV. HAYES.

But all that I have been trying to say about Congressional patronage, is condensed into a few lines of Gov. Hayes' admirable letter accepting the nomination for President. Never have the pernicious effects of this usurpation of Executive power by members of Congress been better stated :

“The offices in these cases have become not merely rewards for party services, but rewards for services to party leaders. This system destroys the independence of the separate departments of the Government. It tends directly to extravagance and official incapacity ; it is a temptation to dishonesty ; it hinders and impairs that careful supervision and strict accountability by which alone faithful and efficient service can be secured ; it obstructs the prompt removal and sure punishment of the unworthy ; in every way it degrades the civil service and the character of the Government. It is felt, I am confident, by a large majority of the members of Congress, to be an intolerable burden and an unwarrantable hindrance to the proper discharge of their legitimate duties. It ought to be abolished. The reform should be thorough, radical, and complete.”

Every one of these golden sentences might easily be expanded into a chapter, for which the experience of the Government would afford any number of cases in point. The whole passage betokens not only very careful observation, but long and earnest thought on the subject ; and for this very reason, I have no doubt that in the minds of those members of Congress who do *not* feel the present system to be "an intolerable burden," but regard it rather as a badge of honor and cling to it as the old toper to his cup, Gov. Hayes' letter of acceptance excited secret misgiving and disgust. Stolen waters are sweet ; and not a few Congressmen seem to take especial delight, too often to the neglect of their proper duties, in playing the part of busybodies in Executive matters, both doing and speaking things which they ought not.

Such are the four principal stages by which the Federal patronage has come to be so tremendous a political power, and the spring of such unspeakable mischief to the country. The tenure of office law, passed as a curb upon President Johnson after he had begun to "swing around the circle," modified somewhat the then existing practice, but it was enacted in the interest of the Republican party rather than that of civil service reform, and is wholly inadequate as a cure of the spoils system. It not only leaves untouched most of the old evils, but in some respects, it is to be feared, actually increases and fortifies them. This is almost always the effect of mere party legislation.

## XI.

## MACHINERY OF THE SYSTEM.

No great political abuse becomes established without at the same time organizing an appropriate system of agencies for maintaining and perpetuating its power. Although a diseased action of the body politic, it yet has, like all disease, its own laws of growth and influence. It works both by contagion and by design; in the way of evil example and by crafty, unscrupulous management. With equal energy and skill it seizes upon weak points in existing political machinery, or devises new methods. The primary election, the primary assembly, the caucus, the executive committee, and the nominating convention, will illustrate my meaning. These are the ordinary and convenient, if not the best, arrangements for initiating and conducting our political contests. But each of them has a weak point; it is liable to be neglected by the better class of citizens, and so to fall into the hands, if not of the worst, yet of an inferior class of citizens. Each of them, therefore, may readily be diverted from its proper use and turned into a mere instrument of selfish and scheming partisans. And this is just what is all the time occurring. But when the primary meeting or assembly, the caucus, the executive committee, and the nominating convention are once in the hands of scheming partisans, the honest, enlightened sentiment of the community is paralyzed; the right man for the right place is ignored; all is done according to what is called "the slate" prepared by the secret wire-pullers; and if the best man

is selected and a right policy laid down, it is not on principle at all, but as an incidental means of success; it is a tub thrown out to pacify the popular whale and divert his attention.

Everything, in fine, is managed just as if an election were a game of chance, the public offices so much money, and the party leaders so many gamblers playing for the stake. And when the election involves the principal offices of a State—still more, when it involves the principal offices of the Union—no argument is needed to show what an exciting game it becomes. In the great cities, where the Federal patronage is chiefly dispensed, this prostitution of the ordinary political agencies to personal and partisan ends is easiest and most effective, and here, accordingly, the evil reaches its maximum. The Custom-house and the Post-office especially tend to become ruling centres of electioneering influence and intrigue, not to say intimidation. Candidates for Governors, Senators, and Representatives in Congress are often named and virtually chosen by them, and thus a league of mutual friendship, coöperation, and defense is formed between the powers at Washington City and the army of office-holders and office-seekers throughout the country, whereby their common interests are consolidated into a sort of political joint-stock company and so insured against hostile attack and loss.

This system of "machine" politics, as it is aptly called, is not, it is true, peculiar to our times or to our own country; nor is it confined wholly to the sphere of civil affairs. In principle it has existed in all countries and in all ages, where men combined for securing the triumph of party plans and opinions, or

winning the prizes of honor and station; and it has prevailed in church as well as state. In fact, the history of ecclesiastical councils and assemblies would afford, perhaps, the most striking of all illustrations of its power and its malign influence. This only verifies the old saying that is written: *When the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord.* There is no form of human association, however necessary or excellent in its design, which may not readily be converted into an instrument of selfish greed, ambition, and partisanship. The best motives may be most easily counterfeited. It costs a severe course of training and self-discipline to *be* a thoroughly honest, patriotic, disinterested, and truthful man; but it costs no effort whatever to *pretend* to be such. Anybody (says Aristotle in reference to a similar point) "anybody can miss the mark; but invariably to hit it in the very eye—that is the work of rare, consummate skill."

Scores of party strikers and wire-pullers may be found in any ward of this city, whose devotion to their country and its best interests, if you judge by their talk, is far greater than Washington ever claimed for himself. And the same may be said of not a few of the leading party managers. In what high-sounding resolutions are they wont to ventilate their pent-up zeal for the public good! It is not possible, then, to keep artful and bad men—men of selfish, ignoble, and coarse passions—out of politics. In no sphere do they swarm in greater force; in no sphere are they more at home; and nowhere have they freer or larger scope for the exertion of their blighting influence.

Here, as almost nowhere else, they know how to bring their craftiest strategy and tactics into play. Their objective point is, invariably, to get full control of the machinery; for that once secured, all the rest follows well-nigh as a matter of course. It becomes then a comparatively easy thing to defy, or to circumvent and override, the popular will, if that is against them; or to trim their sails to the favoring wind of public opinion, if that happens to blow in the right direction. And in order to get control of the machine, they always contrive if possible to initiate, or at least to take part in those private, confidential talks and conferences which so often form the real beginning of the most important party movements—just as certain tiny, delicate threads form the nucleus of the great fly-catching spider's web. They never fail also to attend the primary meeting, and rarely fail to be on hand and in possession of the place, when their unsuspecting fellow-citizens, who are in quest of Civil Service Reform, arrive. In almost everything, indeed, they are ahead. Like the sailors in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*,—

We were the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea,

they are "the first" in every great political operation, more especially in having "suggested" the names of successful candidates. And in this struggle to get and keep control of the party reins and whip, they are troubled by no petty scruples. All the maxims of skillful roguery and deception seem to be at their tongue's end. How well, for example, they follow—in spirit, if not to the letter—the admonitions



which Mrs. Margery Lobkins, or "Peggy Lob," as she was familiarly called, gives to "Leetle Paul" in "Paul Clifford:"

"Mind thy kittychism, child, and reverence old age. Never *steal!* 'specially when any one be in the way. Never go snacks with them as be older than you; 'cause why? The older a cove be, the more he cares for hisself, and the less for his partner. At twenty we diddles the public, at forty we diddles our cronies. Be modest, Paul, and stick to your sitation in life. Read your Bible, and *talk like a pious 'un*. People goes by your WORDS more than your *actions*. If you wants what is not your own, try and do without it; and, if you can not do without it, take it away by *insinivation*, not bluster. They as swindles does more and risks less *than they as robs.*"

But if this policy of meek hypocrisy and insinuation prove ineffectual or out of place, they are always ready to change their tactics and adopt the rougher methods. "There, boy," said the aforesaid "Peggy," stroking "Leetle Paul's" head fondly and giving him a piece of money, "you does right not to play for nothing, it's a loss of time! But play with those as be less than yourself, *and then you can go for to beat 'em* if they says you go for to cheat."

These precious lessons of worldly wisdom given to little Paul, indicate very clearly the sort of principles upon which the political machine has been too often run, not alone in this city, but more or less in whole States, and even in the country at large. It can not be otherwise while the spoils system bears sway. Under its influence the best elements in a party will be inevitably repressed, and the worst elements, sooner or later, are sure to gain the mastery and leaven the whole lump.

Let me not, however, be misunderstood. I am not

so foolish as to decry political organization, or to fancy that the choice of our rulers and the other weighty functions of civil society can be performed without appropriate agencies. Nor am I foolish enough to expect any political organization to be perfect, or any political agencies, however proper and excellent, to move without friction. Very far from it. What I denounce is the utter perversion of political organization to mere personal and party ends; it is such an abuse of political agencies as makes them instruments of evil instead of good to the community. Who can deny the fearful prevalence of such abuse and perversion? and that not only in the great voluntary associations of party, but in the very bodies whose appointed duty and sole business it is, by wise legislation, to seek and promote the public good? It is notorious that the assembling of even the national Legislature is sometimes the cause of widespread anxiety, while its adjournment is hailed with a feeling of general relief.

Still less would I insinuate sweeping, indiscriminate charges against all politicians or all office-holders. It would be the height of injustice. I have been speaking of the inevitable tendency of a system, and not of the character of individuals. Our public life is honored and adorned by many faithful servants of the Republic, whose hands are unsoiled, who despise deceit and trickery, and whose patriotism is sound to the core. I believe not a few of our Senators and Representatives in Congress, of both parties, and from all sections of the country, are as pure, as high-minded, and as loyal in their devotion to the public interests as any of those who have gone before them.



They are men, and are, therefore, fallible and imperfect; but their desire and honest aim is to fulfill, according to the best of their ability, the trust committed to them by the people.

Nor do I question in the least that there are thousands of office-holders throughout the land, whose manhood is still untarnished by the debasing methods of party-politics. Such men, however, would themselves confess that they have had a hard road to travel, and that it would give them the greatest relief imaginable to be assured, that henceforth their continuance in place will depend solely upon their own merits, and not upon the good pleasure of their patron Senator, or of the Representative of their district; or, worse still, upon the favor of some local politician and party manager.

## XII.

### POLITICS AS A TRADE.

Having noticed the machinery and agencies of the spoils system, I will now point out some of the specific evils of which it is the direct cause, or which are greatly increased and intensified by its influence. And the first is, that it makes politics a trade. Public service, in a free country, is certainly one of the noblest spheres of human exertion. It is a sphere of the highest earthly duties, and as such is entitled to the best talents and the self-devotion of the best men. But the instant office is sought, or bestowed, or used for mere pecuniary considerations, the instant it becomes a matter of sale and purchase, its character is gone; from one of the highest it is degraded

to one of the lowest and most ignoble spheres of human exertion; all who have to do with it receive an evil taint. Trading in office is really one of the worst kinds of political immorality. A great outcry was raised—and very justly—against those managers of the *Crédit Mobilier* who distributed its shares among members of Congress where they “would do the most good.” Public opinion was naturally shocked at the attempt to secure favorable legislation by such means. And yet, in point of fact, the spoils system is a *Crédit Mobilier* of another sort, on a vastly larger scale, and a hundred times more debasing. It is, from first to last, a scheme of bargain and sale. Offices are distributed where they “will do the most good” in the way of carrying out the ambitious and selfish purposes of party leaders. It is, in effect, bribery on the one hand and venality on the other. Place is bestowed and accepted with the tacit, if not express, understanding that it is to be paid for, sometimes in so much money, but if not in money, yet in votes, in influence, and in active, entire subserviency to the behests of the patron.

The custom of regularly assessing the Government employés in the departments at Washington and all over the country, in order to raise funds for electioneering purposes, is a striking case in point. The extent to which the custom was formerly carried, its harsh, inquisitorial character, and the large amounts secured by it, are almost incredible. It is said that this practice has been so far modified as to make the contribution voluntary, instead of exacting it on peril of loss of place. But there are many ways of effacing the distinction between the voluntary and the involun-

tary, and the party whips and pimps know them well. Then so far as votes, influence, and active exertion are concerned, these are still demanded, and are often far more valuable than money. It is one of his many claims to popular respect and good-will that in the late national election Mr. James, the Postmaster of this city, refused to allow his subordinates to be used even as United States deputy marshals. This is itself the sign of a great change going on in public sentiment in reference to this matter.

It would require a volume to point out in detail the various methods and tricks of politics as a trade. One of the most noted is what is called lobbying. For years votes necessary to pass certain bills through the Legislature of New York were bought up by our late master, Mr. Tweed, and his emissaries, with as little ado as if they had been so many pieces of damaged dry-goods offered for sale; and votes needed to defeat all bills which Mr. Tweed deemed hostile to his interests, were purchased with the same cool effrontery. If all the lobbying secrets of the Capitol at Albany, and of the City Hall and party wire-pullers of this town, both Republican and Democratic, during the past ten years, were to be fully revealed, they would, no doubt, "a tale unfold" at which the honest men of both parties would stand aghast. I suppose the records of municipal or political crime, robbery, and rascality, during the same period the world over, even in the "effete monarchies" of Europe, would afford nothing to be compared with it. Had their just deserts been awarded to the ring-leaders of this gigantic conspiracy and treason against the majesty of law and the moral life of society, they

would all of them, years ago, have been breaking stones in the State's prison. And yet to this day public opinion is more or less hoodwinked, and the public conscience perplexed, or half-paralyzed, by the skill with which some of them have covered up their tracks, and even the worst of them put on the airs of injured innocence, or, through their lawyers, denied and fought desperately against the truth!

What a beautiful lesson of public spirit and fidelity to public trusts this matchless villainy taught, and is still teaching, our aspiring young men! In the days of its triumph, when it flourished like a green bay-tree, it seemed to say to them, in answer to the question propounded long ago by Jonathan Wild: "Can any man doubt whether it is better to be a great statesman or a common thief?" Perhaps not; but if one can be *both together*, is not that better still? And now in the days of its sere and yellow leaf, it teaches them, that even if a great 'statesman' is so unfortunate as to become a common thief, there is a fair chance of his coming off in the end, if not with flying colors, yet with his head safe upon his shoulders, enough plunder left to keep him from starving, and plenty of old friends and comrades who still speak kindly of him, and are in mortal terror lest he should speak unkindly and tell what he knows of them!

But the Tweed regime was only an exceptionally vile and enormous misgrowth. The same cancerous taint is still in our political system, and may, at any time, break out again, both at Albany and in this city. Unless the people themselves take the matter in hand and cure it, so far as it is curable, by stringent constitutional provisions, as well as by law and public

opinion, there is no security against a constant recurrence of the evil. None of the old crooked methods have passed out of existence; and there are still plenty of the old offenders in office or actively engaged in politics, to teach the uninitiated how to use them. The tongues of these veterans in the art of deceiving and cheating the people, do not yet cleave to the roof of their mouth—would they might!—nor has their right hand forgotten its cunning; nor is their wondrous power of catching the scent of a “corruption fund,” or their delight in handling it, abated in the least.

Reference has already been made to the national scandal growing out of the *Crédit Mobilier*. Lobbying, not only at Washington, but all over the country, has become a deep political art, and they who have learned it thoroughly and can use it with skill, are men in urgent request; for the power of securing votes, whether by the use of money or in other wrong ways—and that is what lobbying, properly so-called, means—is a power behind the throne; it is a power to wield *pro tanto* the legislative will of the nation.

To what extent this corrupt method is sometimes employed in the election of United States Senators I need not say. In a conversation, some years ago, with the late William Curtis Noyes, a man of great abilities and of high Christian character, he gave me a graphic account of the scenes he had just witnessed at Albany in connection with the choice of a Senator from this State. He himself was a candidate for the place; but on finding that, aside from all other considerations, a very large sum of purchase-money was indispensable to his success, he at once abandoned the

field and came home profoundly shocked and saddened by the discovery—saddened, I feel sure, not chiefly by any personal disappointment, but by the painful reflections which it had awakened in his patriotic and thoughtful mind.

The late Presidential election, both before and after the close of the popular canvass, would afford, it is to be feared, very mortifying illustrations of the power and crooked ways of the trading element in politics; and that not merely or chiefly in the disgraceful betting “pools” of this city, but in downright bargain and sale, in wholesale bribery or attempted bribery. But here is not the place to discuss this matter.

I am far from asserting that all these evils come of the spoils system; but certainly they are largely its effect, and in every case are increased and intensified by it.

### XIII.

#### DEMAGOGUES AND THE SPOILS.

Closely connected with the tendency of the spoils system to debase politics to a mere trade, is its tendency to engender and nourish demagogues. “Patronage”—to use an illustration of my brother—“patronage is waved, like a huge magnet, over the land; and demagogues, like iron filings, attracted by a law of their nature, gather and cluster around its poles.” It is noteworthy how many of our most important political terms, both good and bad, we owe to the Greeks, *c. g.*, monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy, polity, politics, demagogue. All the fundamental ideas of the social system, indeed, are found in the history and language of that wonderful people.



And in the "Politics" of Aristotle these ideas are analyzed and expounded with matchless skill. It would be a fortunate thing if this invaluable work could be studied in all our colleges, as a text-book on the philosophy of government and the right method of political thought. It is full of suggestive hints to an American citizen. It were not easy to say whether the amazing genius of the great Stagyrte shows itself with most power in his writings upon the phenomena of nature or the phenomena of society. He was doubtless one of the profoundest political observers that ever lived. His genesis and portraiture of the demagogue is admirable. He defines the sophist as one who deals in seeming, but not real wisdom; and so the demagogue is a seeming, but not real patriot—that is, loyal, devoted servant of his country. Let me cite a passage bearing on this subject. Having described genuine democracy and its characteristic features, he thus proceeds :

"Another kind of democracy is where, other things being the same, the multitude, and not the law, bears sway. This comes to pass when instead of the law the mere resolves of the popular assembly are sovereign; and this is the work of the demagogues; for popular governments in which the constitution and laws are supreme, afford no place for demagogues; but the best citizens are there in authority (literally, *in the presidency*.) Where, however, the laws are not sovereign, demagogues spring up. In such a government the people are a sort of many-headed monarch; for the many rule not as each, but as all. . . . Now such a people, being in truth a monarch, will of course play the king; and inasmuch as it is controlled by no law, readily becomes despotic. Hence flatterers are in honor. A democracy of this description bears the same analogy to a popular government based upon the supremacy of law, that a tyranny bears to the legitimate forms of monarchy. In both, the animus or real character is the same;

both exercise despotism over the better class of citizens ; and the resolves of mass meetings are in the one what edicts and decrees are in the other.

“ The demagogue, too, and the flatterer of the tyrant bear the closest analogy. They are, indeed, at heart the same ; and these have the principal power, each in their respective forms of government ; court favorites with the absolute monarch, and demagogues with a people such as I have described. The demagogues are, in fact, the guilty authors of this degeneracy of popular government, by referring everything to the mere pleasure of the people, without respect to law or right. Thus they aggrandize themselves and become mighty ; by ruling the popular opinion they rule the state ; for the multitude obeys them ! If they wish to overthrow an upright magistrate they accuse him, not before the law, but before the people, which, they say, ought to be his judge ; the people, well pleased, entertain the wrongful proposal, and thus all just authority is dissolved. He who should blame us for calling such a democracy a state or republic, would certainly not censure without reason ; for where the laws do not govern, there is no true state.”\*

At how many points in our history has this spurious democracy, with its attendant flatterers of the people, manifested itself ? And the spoils system, while not the primary cause of demagogues, is a hot-bed for growing them. They existed in the times of Washington, and did what they could to embarrass his administration, thwart his patriotic designs, and by their malignant assaults and calumnies, embitter the closing years of his public life. They will always exist in a free country. But nothing more tends to multiply their number and power than a civil service like ours, which virtually puts the immense patronage of the Government into the hands of members of Congress and local managers, to be dispensed by

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\* *Politics*. Book IV, chap. IV.



them for the purpose of carrying out personal and party schemes, and of satisfying personal and party claims. Demagogues are as naturally bred under such a system, as weeds in a garden richly manured and abandoned of all culture. And whatever tends to multiply this vile, unscrupulous class—this tail of the nation—tends to the corruption and ruin of the state. There is no deadlier enemy of liberty than demagogism. Nor is there any deadlier enemy of law and order, or of social tranquility. All the elements of political mischief are combined in it. Lying and deception, malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speakings, audacious impudence, incendiary appeals to the ignorance, passions, and prejudices of the people—these are the stock in trade of the demagogue. When ambitious men, especially if they be eminent leaders of party and the people, get tainted with this poison and deliberately play the demagogue—as sometimes happens—the peace and prosperity of a generation may be sacrificed. The annals of freedom afford sad proof of this. How many of the disasters that, of late years, have been crushing out the Republican party in the South, are directly traceable to this cause! With some very honorable exceptions, the “carpet-bag” regime—at least in a number of States—appears to have been little better than a grasping oligarchy of native and imported demagogues.

One of the most disgusting phenomena of our political life is the prevalence of a spirit of turbulent, menacing brag and bluster. This, too, is the work of the demagogues. In times of general agitation and excitement, when the waves of party feeling run

high, they seize upon these weapons for the express purpose of intimidating and subduing public opinion. How skillfully they were employed to this end before and after the Presidential election of 1860! The same method has been tried very widely since the recent Presidential election — with what result remains to be seen. It is the old method of the demagogue. *The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk mischievous madness.* (Eccles. x. 13).

#### XIV.

##### DEMAGOGUES AND REPUDIATION.

One of the darkest blots upon the good name of our country is repudiation; and this has been invariably the work of demagogues. Let me illustrate the point by quoting a passage from my brother, at whose feet, more than a third of a century ago, I took my first lessons in civil service reform. He was a man whose patriotic ardor, high sense of public duty, and hatred of demagogues exceeded, if possible, even his wonderful eloquence. The passage occurs in a letter to the illustrious poet of Rydal Mount. Mr. Wordsworth's only daughter and other near relatives held a considerable amount of the so-called Planter's Bank bonds. The letter is dated February 5, 1843, and was designed to explain the causes of repudiation, to declare the writer's belief in the ultimate payment of the bonds in question, and "to relieve at least a portion of his countrymen from the imputation of intentional dishonesty in the eyes of a poet and phi-

losopher, whose good opinion was capable of adding weight even to the character of a nation : ”

“The bonds in which you are interested, I perceive by a memorandum of my brother’s, belong to the class that has not been repudiated. Their validity is acknowledged on all hands ; nor has any pretence ever been set up of illegality or irregularity—either in their inception or sale. I have no doubt of the ultimate payment of these bonds, both principal and interest ; and in this opinion I am sustained by all intelligent men in the country. I would, therefore, advise the holders of this class of Mississippi bonds to avoid sacrificing them.

“The doctrine of repudiation has had a momentary and apparent triumph in this State ; but its success was accidental. . . . It is my deliberate opinion that four-fifths of the people of Mississippi utterly abhor repudiation, and look upon its supporters as the advocates of fraud and dishonesty. But you will perhaps say this opinion is paradoxical ; your Legislature, under your form of government, is chosen by the people, and expresses their will. This Legislature has, by a deliberate act, repudiated a portion, at least, of the public obligations. This act is the act of the people. How, then, can it be said that four-fifths are opposed to what all have done ? I admit the force of the question, and the apparently anomalous character of my proposition ; still it is correct. I know it to be so from my own observation ; and in this case it has happened—as it does frequently in others—that a measure may be carried in the legislative body, at variance with the wishes and opinions of four-fifths of the electors. In the present instance, repudiation resulted out of a contest between two political parties, though it formed no element of either. These two parties were very equally divided, and a slight influence was sufficient to give to either the preponderance. *At this juncture, a few reckless and profligate demagogues, observing the embarrassed and distressed state of the country, which was then at its height, seized upon the idea of repudiating the public debt, and threw it, as make-weight, into their own side of the political scales.* A few persons, for the most part among the ignorant and credulous, alarmed at the thought of increased taxation, which the demagogues told them would consume all

their substance, and excited by artful appeals to their prejudices, and bold assertions of fraud on the part of the purchasers of the public bonds, were led away by this dishonest doctrine, and thus enabled their false leaders to succeed in placing their party in power.\*

"Thus the repudiators, though but a small body, and wholly incapable as a party by themselves, have been able, by holding the balance of power between the two great and legitimate parties of the State, to foist themselves into temporary importance and apparent success. But those who made use of them are already ashamed of their infamous allies."

Unfortunately, my brother was entirely mistaken in his confidence. Mississippi repudiation was a new thing in the land; and with all his political sagacity, he had fully divined neither the virulence of the dis-

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\* A brief editorial of the *Vicksburg Sentinel*, of November 7, 1843, will show the sort of argument and appeal here referred to, and at the same time exhibit the characteristic and invariable temper of the demagogue:

"THE WORK GOES BRAVELY ON.—Far as we can see, the gallant Subterraneans are doing their duty manfully and well! The battle will be well fought, and if the enemy gain the victory, it will be well earned and hard won.

"Stand up to the racks to-day, boys! Let those who did not vote yesterday, come forward and do so to-day; and let those who have voted, and who love the cause, aid in bringing up our corps of reserve to the charge. On, Anti-bondsmen, on! Old Warren, and the City of the Hills, must be rescued! Your birthrights, and those of your children, are at stake; if you are men—if you cherish the great fundamental principle which your fathers proclaimed July 4, '76—if you wish to give the death-blow to funding and consequent taxation throughout the world—if you have humanity enough not to increase the pangs of starvation under which three-fourths of your fellow-beings in bond and king-ridden Europe are writhing—go, we say, to the polls to-day and record your vote against the iniquitous system. The present crisis is no ordinary one; the issue is not confined to Mississippi—no, it is a contest in which is marshalled, on one side, a *privileged aristocracy, moneyed influence*, bonds, and endless taxation; and, on the other, *Freedom, Justice, and Humanity!* One rally, one charge, and the victory which is now in sight will be ours!"

How long the writer of this patriotic effusion had been in the United States, I do not know. He was an impulsive, warm-hearted Irishman, and was soon after killed in a duel.

ease, whether in its acute or chronic form, nor the tendency of demagogism of this sort to leaven the whole lump of a party, that has once tampered with it and obtained power through its influence. "In matters of this sort (Mr. Wordsworth replied) time, as in the case of my relatives, is of infinite importance, and it is to be feared that the two individuals, for whose comfort payment is of the most consequence, may both be in their graves before it comes. They are advanced in life and one has a large family; and both, owing to various misfortunes, are in very narrow circumstances. Let but taxes, in amount however small, once be imposed exclusively for discharging these obligations, and that measure would be hailed as the dawn of a coming day; but until that is effected, the most sanguine must be subject to fits of despondency."

More than ten years later, two or three years after the death of both my brother and Mr. Wordsworth, the legal and constitutional validity of the repudiated "Union Bank" bonds, as they were called, was unanimously affirmed by the High Court of Errors and Appeals; but both the principal and interest of these bonds, as well as those of the Planter's Bank, remain unpaid to this day.

I have dwelt somewhat upon this case, partly because it is such an instructive comment upon the subject in hand; and in part, I confess, because it touches a momentous question of the hour—a question vitally connected with the financial and moral character of many States of the Union, and hardly less with our national honor and the future of American civilization.

## XV.

## SPOILS AND THE BALLOT-BOX.

It is now admitted by all patriotic and thoughtful citizens, that one of the greatest perils to constitutional liberty in this country, grows out of the abuse and prostitution of the elective franchise. But what is the cause and motive of this terrible crime against the Republic? In order to answer this question aright, we must especially consider two things, viz.: the inevitable effect of Executive, or rather Congressional, patronage as now described, and then the influence of unscrupulous politicians and wire-pullers. The first is to stimulate the passion for office to such a degree as to render its subjects willing to use fraud and force, or to connive at the use of fraud and force, for the purpose of defeating an honest vote and an honest count. The second furnishes the appropriate agency for carrying out the conspiracy. It is simply impossible, by any exercise of mere influence, or moral suasion, or public opinion even, to keep the ballot-box pure under the enormous temptations and pressure of the spoils system. One might almost as well try by such means to stop the spread of small-pox or cholera—for the poison is in the political atmosphere—and it is well-nigh as difficult a task to stop the contagion by mere legal expedients. Those who profit by the abuse will spare no effort by bribery, the partisan press, the party-whip, and similar means, to prevent the passage of stringent laws on the subject; or if such laws are passed, to evade their grasp.



When the prize is so great, nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of seizing it. There are various methods of defeating the popular will as expressed in the will of the majority, and any one, or all, of these methods will, if possible, be used with equal unscrupulousness; *e. g.*, false naturalization, illegal registration, no registration, repeating, perjury, forgery, ballot-box stuffing, bribery, intimidation, deceptive tricks upon the ignorance or credulity of voters, and a dishonest count. In our great cities especially, where the voting population is massed in large numbers, where the voters do not know each other, where the dangerous classes of society—who haunt the dram-shop, the gambling hell, and the den of infamy—are not only in full force, but at many polls cast the majority of ballots, and where are to be found the most skillful and reckless party managers, well supplied with the sinews of war, it is evident that the facilities for corrupting the ballot-box by all these methods are most abundant. And then special audacity is here infused into schemes of fraud by the fact that in so many cases the vote of the great city may overcome the vote of the country, and so determine not only the local result, but the result, also, in the whole State, if not in the nation. It is enough to refer, in the way of illustration, to the vote of New York City and Brooklyn in 1868 and 1876.

It seems to me, therefore, extremely difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the purity of the ballot-box in large portions of our country, by any mere legislative safeguards, so long as the spoils system continues to operate. But once abolish that system by a wise and effective reform, which shall put the civil

service on the same foundation of honesty, capacity, and fidelity upon which it stood under all the earlier Presidents, on substantially the same foundation as our admirable military and naval service; once eliminate from our elections the abnormal and corrupting influence of the Federal patronage as now wielded; once blow off in this way the steam of boiling passion which rages so madly in the midst of a Presidential canvass, threatening to burst and shatter into a thousand fragments the constitutional machinery of the Government; once, I say, withdraw this alien, malign, but terrible force from our elections, and the effect would be like magic in divesting them of a large part of their violence, and helping to make them what they ought and were intended to be, a calm, deliberate expression of the will of the people and the public reason.

Could the disturbing influence, which the fears of the great army of office-holders and the hopes of the thirty-fold greater army of office-seekers have brought, and still bring, to bear upon the existing national crisis, be suddenly removed from both scales, the difficulty in the way of a peaceful and satisfactory settlement of the controversy would be immeasurably diminished. What more than anything else intensifies and envenoms all the angry passions incident to the political situation, is the mass of purely selfish and partisan interests involved in the issue. To the overwhelming majority of the American people, of both parties, the only interest involved is one of law and good government; and this is fitted to calm the public mind, not to excite it to violence and wrath.



## XVI.

## SPOILS AND PARTY SPIRIT.

I have shown how the spoils system tends to produce and increase political abuses, being itself a monstrous abuse. Let me now speak of its tendency to aggravate all the bad effects of the spirit of party. The influence of parties forms one of the most interesting as well as instructive chapters in the philosophy of society. Alike in the civil, the religious, and the literary spheres it is a controlling force. No organization, however despotic, can entirely repress it. At first there was an opposing party in the Vatican Council, and the whole strength and resolution of the Papal power was required to stifle its voice in the final vote. The existence of parties is, in fact, a necessary condition of social freedom and progress. All great questions of human thought and action have more than one side, and where opinion is untrammelled, different views respecting them are sure to be taken. The history of the Christian church and doctrine, the history of philosophy, the history of morals, are full of instances; and so is the history of government. How otherwise could vital problems of civil right and duty or of public policy be fairly settled? The constitutional history of England is largely a history of party struggles, and the history of party struggles in the United States is only another name for that of the political progress of the country. An enlightened opposition is hardly less essential to liberty than a wise and just administration.

And yet precisely here is a point of the utmost danger to popular institutions. The spirit of party is always prone to excess. Its natural impulse is to blind, unreasoning obstinacy and violence. In times of public trouble and excitement it easily degenerates into the spirit of faction and sedition. And that is one of the worst evils that can assail a republican government. When the spirit of faction or sedition seizes upon and wields at pleasure the organized forces of a great party, its power of political mischief is appalling. Some of the heaviest calamities that have ever befallen human society, arose in this way. The framers of the Constitution were well aware of this fact, and kept it ever in view while constructing the new political edifice. They strove to lay its foundations so deep in principles of order, justice, and domestic tranquillity, and to build it up in such moral strength, that it could never be "overwhelmed by the tempestuous waves of sedition and party rage." One of their main arguments in favor of the more perfect union was "its tendency to break and control the violence of faction." And on no point is the warning voice of the Father of his Country, in his Farewell Address, louder or more impressive than on this. Let me quote a few sentences from this incomparable legacy of patriotic wisdom and affection:

"The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism. But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries which result, gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later, the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or

more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty. Without looking forward to an extremity of this kind (which, nevertheless, ought not to be entirely out of sight), the common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise people to discourage and restrain it. It serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms; kindles the animosity of one part against another; foment occasionally riot and insurrection. . . . There is an opinion that parties in free countries are useful checks upon the administration of government, and serve to keep alive the spirit of liberty. This, within certain limits, is probably true; and in governments of a monarchical cast, patriotism may look with indulgence, if not with favor, upon the spirit of party. But in those of the popular character, in governments purely elective, it is a spirit not to be encouraged. From their natural tendency, it is certain there will always be enough of that spirit for every salutary purpose. And, there being constant danger of excess, the effort ought to be, by force of public opinion, to mitigate and assuage it. A fire not to be quenched, it demands a uniform vigilance to prevent its bursting into a flame, lest, instead of warming, it should consume."

Had Washington foreseen the rapid development, vast expansion, and overshadowing influence of Federal patronage; had he foreseen the enormous, deep-rooted system of political abuse and corruption that, within less than half a century, would grow up and become identified with it; had he, at the same time, foreseen how all the evils of party spirit which he so much dreaded—its factious, vindictive, tyrannical, and incendiary passions—would be thereby increased and intensified seven-fold—I am sure his great heart, so full of love and solicitude for his country, would have been smitten with deep prophetic grief, and even been tempted almost to despair of the Republic! Let all

who are trying to find out and apply a remedy for the evil, be thankful that they have Washington's own practice, his inestimable counsels, and the example of his unwearied, patient, self-sacrificing patriotism to guide, as well as cheer, them on their difficult way.

## XVII.

### PUBLIC SPIRIT.

If the spirit of party is prone to constant excess, true public spirit, on the other hand, is liable to no such perversion. There can not be too much of it, any more than there can be too much pure air, or too much well-being. It is in itself a substantial, unmingled blessing; for it seeks not its own, but the general good. Mere party spirit, at the best, is little more than its shadow; at the worst, is a miserable counterfeit and mockery of it. Without something of this better, conservative element, party, however loud-tongued and though strong enough to remove mountains, is only another name for selfish faction. But genuine public spirit, like gospel charity, suffereth long and is kind; envieth not; vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things. It is the perennial spring of liberty, of intellectual progress, and of all generous, noble deeds. It is the vital stuff out of which have been fashioned, and are fashioned still, the great founders, heroes, reformers, martyrs, sages, law-givers, and leaders of the race. Without it human society

would be a moral desolation ; for where there is no public spirit, even the fairest personal and domestic virtues suffer an eclipse.

A free people, therefore, can not take too much pains to remove, as far as possible, all causes that tend, directly or indirectly, to repress and stifle public spirit. But the present system of Federal patronage is singularly adapted to produce this evil result ; and that in two principal ways.

First, by substituting for public spirit mere partisan zeal and greed. In this respect its operation is not unlike that of purely worldly motives in the sphere of religion ; they tend to vitiate true piety, and put in its place mere outward profession and sectarian, or theological, passion and bigotry. Just in the degree that men are governed in the service of God by these influences, just in that degree is the Christian spirit extinguished. So in the sphere of civil life and duty, motives that have the spoils for their object are essentially hostile to those which aim at the general good. The one class can not gain the ascendancy without subduing and driving out the other class. *No man can serve two masters ; for either he will hate the one and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other.* A thorough-going, fanatical partisan can not be a wise and useful citizen. And while there are various party agencies whereby the spoils system enfeebles and debases public spirit, one is preëminently effective—I mean the *subsidized party press*. I need not stop to show what a mighty and shaping power in and upon our times, the daily newspaper has become. It is a ruling estate, alike in the realm of opinion and of civil and social life.

Its services to the cause of humanity, to civilization, and to the general happiness, as well as intelligence, are inestimable. But when degraded into a servile instrument of party prejudice and tyranny—especially when it becomes the paid ‘organ’ of some ambitious politician, or office-holder, or ring—it acts upon the sentiments of public duty and justice with blighting effect. And one of the earliest and bitterest fruits of the spoils system was thus to subsidize and shackle the press. Mr. Webster, more than forty years ago, put his strong finger upon this sore spot. After depicting the office and blessings of a free press, he proceeds thus :

“Is a press that is purchased or pensioned more free than a press that is fettered? Can the people look for truths to partial sources, whether rendered partial through fear or through favor? Is dependence on the Government for bread no temptation to screen its abuses? Is the truth in no danger, is the watchman under no temptation when he can neither proclaim the approach of national evils, nor seem to descry them, without the loss of his place? Mr. President, an open attempt to secure the aid and friendship of the public press, by bestowing the emoluments of office on its active conductors, seems to me, of everything we have witnessed, to be the most reprehensible. It degrades both the government and the press. As far as its natural effect extends, it turns the palladium of liberty into an engine of party. It brings the agency, activity, energy, and patronage of government, all to bear with united force, on the means of general intelligence, and on the adoption or rejection of political opinions. It so completely perverts the true object of government, it so entirely revolutionizes our whole system, that the chief business of those in power is directed rather to the propagation of opinions favorable to themselves, than to the execution of the laws. This propagation of opinions, through the press, becomes the main administrative duty. Some fifty or sixty editors of leading journals have been appointed to office by the present Executive.”



After speaking again of a pure and independent press in terms of the highest admiration, and disclaiming all thought of excluding an editor simply as such from office, if he is the fittest man, Mr. Webster goes on to say :

“ The ground of complaint is, that the aiding, by the press, of the election of an individual, is rewarded by that same individual with the gift of moneyed offices. Men are turned out of office, and others put in, and receive salaries from the public treasury, on the ground, either openly avowed or falsely denied, that they have rendered service in the election of the very individual who makes this removal and makes this appointment. Every man, sir, must see that this is a vital stab at the purity of the press. It not only assails its independence by addressing sinister motives to it, but it furnishes from the public treasury the means of exciting these motives.” \*

That public spirit, then, so essential to republican liberty, and the source of its greatest strength and beauty, sickens and dies out under the withering influence of corrupt patronage. It is supplanted by the self-seeking spirit of party.

But this is not all. Another sentiment is engendered of the spoils, hardly less destructive of public spirit than the most reckless partisan zeal ; I mean the sentiment of moral repugnance and aversion. An interesting essay might be written on *Disgust as a political force*. It is, undoubtedly, the real secret of not a little of the apathy with which so many good men regard their civil duty and the affairs of government. They have become nauseated by the corrupt and outrageous methods of party politics. They have learned to despise the unscrupulous politician

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\* Speech at Worcester, October 12, 1832.



and wire-puller as they despise the heartless men who get up and manipulate swindling railroads and rotten life-insurance concerns, for the purpose of cozening and fleecing the innocent public. They loathe a blustering demagogue as they do a sneak-thief or an abortionist. Worse still, they have lost all patience with parties, and all faith in them as trustworthy guardians or organs of liberty and the general good.

“A plague o’ both your houses !”

they cry out. They even begin to doubt the capacity of the people themselves for honest and wise self-government. What, after all, is our boasted self-government (they say) but the rule of an oligarchy of politicians and office-holders? Why, then, in deference to an effete 4th of July superstition, should we cherish still the creed of a free representative republic, when it is plain as day that the actual system under which we groan is that of a mere democracy of numbers, at once servile and despotic;—despotic toward opposing or independent thought and the rights of the minority, but utterly slavish in its subjection to party opinion and the party-whip. Look, for example, at the working of “free institutions” in the city of New York for the last ten years, and then tell us if, on the whole, anything in the shape of government meaner, more extortionate, less worthy of respect, better fitted to excite mingled shame, contempt, and indignation—exists, or has existed, during the century, in any city of Christendom, unless in times of war, mob-violence, or revolution? And why should we lie to our own consciences and to the world, by giving to such a scandalous caricature and

prostitution of righteous authority and administration, the honored name of republican liberty?

Comparatively few, to be sure, speak out so plainly; but thousands say these things in their hearts. And such feelings are perfectly natural; to a certain extent, they are, also, right and salutary. Nature has planted them deep in the human breast. Moral repugnance and aversion are the necessary counterpart of heartfelt approval and affection. It is a mark of true virtue, says Aristotle, to love things lovable, and to hate the things that ought to be hated. *Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.*

But whatever may be said in defense of the disgust and indignation, I do not justify either the apathy or the scepticism. I hold both to be alike wrong. We are bound to do our duty as American citizens in the face of any odds or any discouragements; and we ought never to despair of the Republic.

For every gift of noble origin  
Is breathed upon by Hope's perpetual breath.

But, on the other hand, it is foolish to shut our eyes to the fact that a sentiment of profound disgust and alienation in reference to public affairs, is widespread through the community; that such a sentiment, when it takes the form of apathy and unbelief, is exceedingly injurious to the vital interests of American society; and that the whole tendency of the system, which substitutes party and the spoils in place of

country, as the central motives of political opinion and action, and of the administration of office—is to produce and strengthen this sentiment.

“When it comes to be once understood (says Mr. Calhoun) that politics is a game ; that those who are engaged in it but act a part ; that they make this or that profession, not from an honest conviction or an intent to fulfill them, but as the means of deluding the people, and through that delusion to acquire power, when such professions are to be entirely forgotten—the people will lose all confidence in public men ; all will be regarded as mere jugglers—the honest and the patriotic as well as the cunning and the profligate ; and the people will become indifferent and passive to the grossest abuses of power, on the ground that those whom they may elevate under whatever pledges, instead of reforming, will but imitate the example of those whom they here expelled.”

If, then, we would see a genuine, self-sacrificing, magnanimous public spirit animating all classes—particularly, the more cultivated and influential classes—we should make haste to put down a system which is in such deadly antagonism to this spirit.

## XVIII.

### PUBLIC LIFE AND STEWARDSHIP.

It is a frequent as well as just complaint that so many able men, admirably fitted to dignify and adorn public life, either refuse to enter it, or, as is more apt to be the case, are virtually banished from it. The consequence is that a deplorably large number of important positions are filled by inferior men, who command respect neither for capacity or for character.

They are not merely without any true intellectual and moral culture, but not a few of them are utterly vulgar in their tastes and habits. That they hold their places in trust, and are bound by every consideration of honor and duty to seek not their own profit, but the good of the community, in every measure they advocate, and in every vote they give—this is a thought of which they seem wholly incapable. They are the pest of wise rule and authority. They are the natural enemies as well as the opprobrium of good government. What a mass of pure, unmitigated selfishness—and selfishness in some of its lowest and worst forms—is through them concentrated and busily at work in our halls of legislation! Under any system there will be a great deal too much of this. No principle of natural selection, or of popular election, will ever so elevate and purify civil life as to keep out of it human folly and passion and avarice. But, surely, we need not put a premium upon them—we need not take pains to render public life more attractive and accessible to men of a low intellectual and moral grade; or to render it less attractive and accessible to men of high moral and intellectual grade. Yet this is just what we do by tolerating the existing abuses of Federal patronage. The system might well be patented as a model contrivance for keeping or throwing out of public life the men best qualified to perform its duties, and for crowding public life with the men least fitted or inclined to perform its duties. And when I speak of qualifications, I do not refer merely, or mainly, to superior mental or educational gifts, nor to political knowledge and training, although these are all invaluable; still less to brilliant powers

of speech, or what is called eloquence; I refer to those plain, honest, home-spun virtues of integrity, good sense, candor, moderation, justice, prudence, clear-headedness, firmness, and disinterested zeal for the general good, which are at once the substantial base and the best elements of American character, and without which wise and fruitful statesmanship is impossible.

But not only is the direct tendency of Federal patronage as now wielded, to crowd public life with unsuitable and small men, it tends indirectly to generate an atmosphere not at all favorable to a fine sense of personal independence and self-respect, even in politicians of the higher and better class. Under its influence they sometimes contract the office-seeking fever, and are led by it to say and do very unseemly things. There is one form of this strange and exciting malady—a perfectly distinct type—which consists in an intense and irrepressible desire to be President of the United States; and some of our greatest statesmen, it is notorious, have been violently seized with it. Complete recovery is affirmed to be extremely rare. As a gentle monomania, or hallucination, at least, it will hang on to the very end of life, still keeping up in the bosom of its subject the fond hope of one day grasping the much-coveted prize.

It would, probably, be so, more or less, in any case; for ambition is an infirmity of the noblest minds; but there can be no doubt that the spoils system in manifold ways greatly increases the trouble.

And while one effect of it is to keep a large class of able and good men out of office, and to inspire a second class with a very inordinate anxiety to get into

office, still another of its evil effects is to impair the sense of responsibility in those who actually occupy places of public rule and trust. The feeling of moral stewardship is at the root of all public virtue and sound, rightful administration. Where it is entirely wanting, the dearest interests of society pay the penalty. There, not only do thieves and robbers break through and steal, but thieves and robbers are in full possession of the house, hold the keys to all its valuables, and do with them as they list. No one thing is more characteristic of true, honest service, whether performed by a clerk in the Custom-house, a Secretary of the Treasury, a member of Congress, or a President of the United States, than this feeling. It is the brightest and strongest, though often a secret, link in the mystic chain that binds together in one manly fellowship of duty and honor all classes and descriptions of good public officers, from the highest to the lowest. *He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.* Could we look through the various departments of Government with the eye of Omniscience, we should, perhaps, discover the most exemplary public servant—not in the Chief Magistrate of the nation, or in the halls of Congress, or even on the bench of the Supreme Court, but in one of “the plain people,” who for thirty or forty years has toiled on, unknown, ill-paid, and often in terror of summary dismissal, doing cheerfully and with diligence whatsoever his hand findeth to do, simply for the sake of God and his country.

A servant, with this clause,  
Makes drudgery divine ;  
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,  
Makes that and th’ action fine.



And as this high sense of duty is the one thing most characteristic of true, honest service, even so its total absence is the one thing most characteristic of all bad, worthless, hypocritical service. And right here is the weak, diseased spot in our civil administration. It is too accessible to drones and sinecurists. It is still burdened with too many men of the sort so well described by my brother, nearly forty years ago :

“ Office is conferred as the reward of partisan service ; and what is the consequence ? Why, the office-holders are not content with the pitiful salaries which afford only small compensation for present labors, but do not, in their estimation, constitute any adequate reward for their previous political services. This reward, they persuade themselves, it is perfectly right to retain from whatever passes through their hands. Being taught that all moneys in their possession belong not to the people, but to the party, it requires but small exertion of casuistry to bring them to the conclusion that they have a right to retain what they may conceive to be the value of their political services ; just as a lawyer holds back his commissions. . . . Do you not see the eagerness with which even Governors, Senators, and Representatives in Congress grasp at the most trivial appointments—the most insignificant emoluments ? Well do these sons of the horse-leech know that there is more blood in the body than what mantles in the cheek, and more profit in an office than is exhibited by the salary. . . . Corruption has been traced, not merely to the doors, but into the very recesses of the temple. By the footprints upon the floor we have discovered, as did the Chaldeans of old, that the rich offerings laid by the people upon the shrine, have been carried away and consumed, not by the god, but by the *juggling priests*. . . . It is a deep and vital question how such things are to be prevented in the future ; how this running sore is to be healed ; how this system of negligence and corruption is to be stopped, and the action of the Government brought back to its original purity.”

Negligence and corruption will never be stopped



until public office of whatever kind—from the Presidency to a Treasury or Custom-house clerkship—comes to be regarded as a sacred trust, received and held in the interest of the Government and of the whole people—not in the interest of a party, still less of a party manager or member of Congress.

At the same time I desire to avoid all unfairness or injustice. My impression is, that our civil service has, in some respects, materially improved of late years. This is to be attributed in part, perhaps, to a more enlightened public sentiment, as also to the special attempts at reform; and partly to the circumstance that, owing to the long continuance of the same party in power, the tenure of office, in many cases, has been very much lengthened, and thereby the sense of security so essential to quiet, faithful work, has been increased, and a great addition also made to the actual skill and experience of the service. But there can be no doubt whatever that a vast deal remains to be done; or that a total change of the ruling political dynasty would instantly expose the country to a recurrence of the worst state of things in the past. Nothing will suffice but a radical reform of the existing system of Federal patronage. And this happy consummation, so devoutly to be wished, will never be realized until the barbarian motto: *To the victors belong the spoils of the enemy*, gives place to the humane and Christian principle of public stewardship—the principle so gloriously illustrated in the lives and labors of the fathers of the Republic, and without whose upholding, inspiring influence our free institutions are but a mockery of liberty.

## XIX.

## CIVIL SERVICE REFORM.

This brings us face to face with the momentous question: How can our civil service be reformed? This, indeed, was the specific topic assigned to me. But instead of discussing it directly, my aim has thus far been to show the absolute necessity of reform, by considering the history, nature, and virulence of the malady it is designed to heal; for a clear comprehension and good diagnosis of disease is the first step toward its cure. Would that the cure were as plain and easy as the diagnosis! I will indicate, very briefly, some of the points which seem to me essential to a radical and complete cure—a cure as thorough, at least, as the infirmities of our nature, the friction incident to the best arrangements, and the more or less conflicting interests involved in any large system of human agencies, will permit. But here I ought to speak with the greatest diffidence; for the views I shall express are chiefly the result of my own observation and reflection, and were mostly formed more than a quarter of a century ago. I have never seen the English reports on this subject, and am almost ashamed to add, that I have not even seen the reports of our own Civil Service Commission. Some years ago I read, with deep interest, a speech on the question by Mr. Jenckes, of Rhode Island—more than any other man, as I have supposed, the father of Civil Service Reform in the United States—and I am well aware of the invaluable efforts in this cause, of Mr. George William Curtis and Mr. D. B.

Eaton, not to mention other eminent names. But precisely what ground they have taken in reference to disputed points, or what were the rules and regulations recommended by the Government Commission, and adopted or partially adopted by the President, I do not know. My conclusions, therefore, if entitled to any weight whatever, will have, at least, the value of fresh and independent testimony.

What, then, is civil service reform? The phrase, as I understand it, has a very simple and definite meaning. There is nothing occult or startling about it. It is only another way of saying, that the civil business of the Government, like any other vast, ever-growing, and permanent business, *ought to be so organized and conducted as to secure the greatest possible efficiency, fidelity, skill, and stability in its performance.* Behold the whole mystery of Civil Service Reform! To this complexion it all comes at last. This is the real thing intended. Let me refer to another reform, also of very recent origin, which will, perhaps, help to understand this, viz.: *Sanitary Reform.* That aims to do for the physical health of the people, something quite analogous to what reform in the civil service aims to do for their political health. It points out the horrid effects of bad ventilation, bad drainage, sewer-gas, cess-pools connecting secretly with wells, and other inveterate, noisome violations of the laws of life; and just so Civil Service Reform points out the horrid effects caused by the moral miasma, the mephitic and poisonous influences, that emanate from the cess-pools and other abominations of corrupt patronage and subterranean party politics. And not only is there a very striking analogy between the two

reforms in the objects aimed at, but in their remedies. It confuses one's brain to read all that is written in the books of Sanitary Science, about the best methods and the details; but the remedy itself is all condensed into Hippocrates' famous formula: "pure air, pure water, and pure soil." And so the civil reform has some knotty problems to solve as to method and detail, as to rules and regulations; but the root and essence of the remedy consists in the simple familiar elements of honesty, capacity, and skilled efficiency in doing the civil business of the Government. Nothing more; nothing less.

On this solid basis of common sense the military and naval business of the country has been conducted from the beginning up to this day; and he would be thought demented who should propose to re-organize and hereafter administer it upon the principle of political influence, partisanship, or "rotation in office." On this basis of common sense the civil service of the country was originally established, and was carried on for a period of forty years—almost half of the lifetime of the Republic. Upon this principle George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, and John Quincy Adams—all of them, with, perhaps, one exception, great civilians—acted and dispensed the Federal patronage throughout their terms of office; while among their successors who adopted the principle of political and party influence and favoritism, only one truly great civilian is to be named; and he was too much absorbed in the mighty cares and labors of the war for the Union, to allow him time or thought for anything else. Indeed, Executive patronage was during his

term essentially a war-power and had to be dispensed, especially in the border and seceding States, in a somewhat summary and exceptional way. Loyalty to the Union was then the primary consideration, both in appointments and removals. But, happily, that crisis of national existence is past and no longer a disturbing force in the administration of the Government. Nothing now stands in the way of a return to the old, time-honored formula: *the greatest attainable skill, fidelity, efficiency, and permanence*. This, I repeat, is the root and essence of the whole matter. This at once conforms the civil service to the practice of the earlier Presidents, brings it again into harmony with the spirit of the Organic Law, and with the genius of republican institutions as well, cleanses it from the corrupting influence of party politics, raises it, all over the country, to the level of other useful and honorable callings, and renders it accessible to every American citizen, who meets its just requirements, without any sacrifice of opinion or self-respect.

I said that nothing now stands in the way of a return to the wise and common-sense system of the earlier times of the Republic. But that statement needs correction. No constitutional or legal principle, no lesson of experience, no great national exigency, stands in the way; but there are other impediments to such a return, which can be overcome only by long patience and the most unwearied efforts. As the abuse has grown up by degrees and entrenched itself in many strongholds—not only of political selfishness and custom, but of popular ignorance and prejudice as well—so the reform must grow up from strength to strength, must entrench itself in public opinion and the public conscience,

must give full proof of its practicability and wisdom, and so gradually win over to its support the good men of all parties, especially the better class of public men, who love their country and seek its honor and prosperity. One of the most painful signs of the times is the sceptical and even contemptuous tone of so many of our public men in reference to this subject. They illustrate very forcibly what the great dramatist of human nature says of the tendency of evil to blind, and render at once callous and incredulous, its willing victims :

For when we in our viciousness grow hard,  
Oh, misery on't, the wise gods seal our eyes,  
In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us  
Adore our errors, laugh at us, while we strut  
To our confusion.

But let not the friends of the cause of their country, on this account, lose heart. Even the advocates of sanitary reform encounter a similar hardness and incredulity; although they deal with flagrant physical facts and demonstrations of medical science. A great many otherwise sensible people, but in this matter very wise in their own conceit, think altogether too much fuss is made about bad air and bad drainage and infected water and sewer-gas; they do not see any such close connection between these things and typhoid fever or any other disease; they do not like to go to such trouble and expense; why not let well enough alone? or at least be content with patching up and improving the old system of things, which "was good enough for our fathers and mothers?" They especially resent the suspicion that there is any



sewer-gas, or other disease-breeding nuisance, hidden away in their own cellars, or anything wrong about their own wells and drainage; do they not—many of them—live in splendid brown-stone houses and pride themselves upon all the modern improvements, as well as upon their fine, healthy situations? So tens of thousands turn their backs upon sanitary reform; nearly the whole community treats it with cold neglect; and in the meantime, myriads of precious lives—lives in the sweet bud of infancy, or blooming into boyish beauty and the loveliness of girlhood, or just ripening into useful men and women, or freighted with the hard-won treasures of later years—fall a prey to the horrible Juggernaut of preventable disease! Still the good work goes on; popular ignorance, inertia, and heedlessness begin to feel the potent touch of the new science; evil habits and practices, whose roots run back to the dark ages, are, here and there, passing away, and by and by the cause of Sanitary Reform will celebrate a splendid victory. And so too, as I firmly believe, will it be with the cause of Civil Service Reform; for it is at heart “the good old cause” for which our fathers toiled and fought and sat in council; it is in another, but not less worthy form, the cause of American liberty and independence. And, therefore, all true patriots and especially (to use the words of Lord Bacon) “young men full of towardness and hope, such as the poets call *Auroræ filii*—sons of the morning”—should strive and labor together for its triumph.



## XX.

## PRACTICAL CONDITIONS OF SUCCESSFUL REFORM.

I have stated already the object and guiding principle of civil service reform. Let me now mention some of its practical conditions. (*a*). *Divorce of patronage from mere political and party influence.* This is a vital point. The public offices do not belong to party, to politicians, to members of Congress, or to the President; they belong to the country and the people, who instituted them for the general good; and they should be filled in such a way that any American citizen, without respect to his opinions, may properly apply for one of them, and if he meets the needful requirements, stand a fair chance of obtaining it. The present system is in glaring conflict with the genius of our free institutions. Under such restrictions as the Constitution, public discretion, and experience prescribe, every position in the Republic should be open to all the people alike. This, if anything, is the true idea of American equality; and it ought to be our practice, as it is our constant boast.

But let me not be misunderstood. I have said that the public offices belong—not to party, or to politicians, or to the President, but—to the people. They do not belong to the people, however, in the merely numerical sense of the term. They do not belong to the people as forty millions of individuals, or in their well-nigh endless local divisions; nor in the sense, that the people, directly and singly, have any rightful claim upon them. The framers of the Constitution were far above such crude and puerile concep-

tions of popular government. It probably never crossed their minds to consider the subject in this empirical way. They had a profound respect for the people of the United States in their imperishable, corporate character, as the sovereign and ruling power in the land; but they would have recoiled from the miserable debasement and caricature of this majestic idea, which the spoils system has so largely substituted in its place, sometimes even in the form of legislation. Take, as an instance, the act of the Forty-third Congress, providing that the appointments in the Treasury department shall be distributed *pro rata* among the several States and Territories according to population. Possibly, there may be reasons of public policy in favor of such a law, which do not appear on its face; but if and so far as it rests upon the notion of rightful claims to office, at Washington, by States and Territories, according to the number of their inhabitants, it seems to me to be founded upon the merest fallacy—a fallacy alike absurd and hurtful. While, then, I assert that the public offices belong to the people of the United States, it is in essentially the same sense in which the Government and the Union and its free institutions belong to them and their posterity forever. And yet the principle of equal opportunity, in reference to the public offices, for all American citizens, irrespective of opinion, is a sound republican and democratic principle. A divorce of the Federal patronage, however, from political and party influence is, I need not say, a very formidable undertaking; for it involves not merely the overthrow of an inveterate and dominant custom, but a revolution, as it were, in the habits of thought

and very consciousness of the popular mind on this subject. The strongest partisan would, probably, be somewhat shocked at a proposal to exclude all the millions of Democrats from admission to the army and navy, or to the military and naval academies; and yet, in principle, where is the difference between such an exclusion and that which, under the despotic pressure of party interest and party usages, debars them from the civil service almost as completely as if they were so many aliens, or even natural enemies of their country? Is this genuine republicanism? Is it anything else than a policy of intolerable narrowness, bigotry, and selfishness? Will any respectable, candid Republican, however decided his opinion of the errors of the Democracy, deny that—to say the least—a very large proportion of that party are, individually, just as honest, just as patriotic, just as capable of doing faithful work as his own? And if so, why are they not just as fairly entitled to a reasonable share in the honors and emoluments of the civil service of their country?

The consequence of this tyrannical system of party ostracism is what a very little knowledge of human nature would lead any one to expect. A sort of badge of inferiority—to use no harsher term—attaches to every Democrat in the United States. The Government itself—speaking in the name of the Republican party—virtually says to them: “You shall not, with our consent, occupy any place of honor and trust in the civil service of your country. If you want office, you must seek it at home; you must get elected governor, senator or assemblyman, or member of Congress; although we shall do what we can

to prevent *that* also. We write over all our doors: *Positively, no admittance for a Democrat! This rule must be strictly enforced.* If you don't like this arrangement, why, it is a free country; the ballot-box is open; vote us out, and take our place, if you can!" Is anybody quite simple enough to believe that the several millions of American citizens, who profess the Democratic creed, will not accept the challenge; or that once in possession of the Government, they are not going to make up for lost time and pay back old scores, good measure, pressed down, and running over?

What a different state of things would exist, if merely those superior and other officers who stand in specially close, responsible relations to the Administration, and represent its policy, whether at home or abroad, were selected from among its political friends, and the remaining offices were open alike to all good citizens, and filled, without regard to opinion, on the simple ground of proper qualifications? If a third or a quarter of these inferior offices of the Government were now occupied by suitable and capable Democrats, the difficulty in the way of Civil Service Reform would be vastly diminished. And it is the opinion of very sagacious politicians that, instead of losing, the party in power would, in the end, largely gain by such a policy. Patronage dispensed on mercenary principles is a source of weakness rather than of strength. Where it makes one friend, it disappoints a score of friends, and is almost sure to make several sore-headed enemies.

(b). *Fair, open competition or equal opportunity.* Here we come, I am aware, to a point beset with

some difficulties ; but they are not essentially greater, probably, than beset proper rules and regulations for carrying on, in the best manner, any widespread and complicated business. It takes time to inaugurate a new system and so adjust its various parts to each other and to the ends in view, that there shall be no needless friction or jarring of the machinery. If equal opportunity, whether by competitive or other examination, is a right principle, we may rest assured it is also practicable. No method can be devised by which all possibility of favoritism, injustice, or mistake shall be avoided. That is beyond the reach of human wisdom. In applying even a thoroughly right principle, there should, of course, be constant care to guard against too much mere technicality, to take into the account of defects and shortcomings compensating advantages, and so to do no wrong to the candidate or applicant, who, though at fault in certain respects, yet having the root of the matter in him, affords, perhaps, the stuff for a most excellent public servant.

Not a little fault has been found with competitive examinations. They have sometimes been denounced as unjust, and sometimes ridiculed as childish and absurd. Similar objection may easily be made to any form of examination, or to any system whatever, that excludes rigidly all mere influence, and opens the door of public service to genuine merit alone. Competition may be badly used or abused, as may every good thing ; but the principle itself can stand any amount of denunciation, or ridicule ; for it is founded in reason and common sense. It is at once

a natural and moral law ; and, wisely obeyed, is fraught with the best results.

(c). *Promotion for merit and length of service.* By merit I mean good character and conduct, as well as tried skill and efficiency. I put merit and length of service together ; but as a matter of fact, they do not always go together. When they do, the reason for promotion is at its maximum. But it does not seem fair that long service and decidedly inferior merit, should always carry the day against shorter service and very superior merit. Both merit and length of service are factors in the case ; but exactly how to adjust their reasonable claims may not always be so easy a problem. Competitive or standard examinations for higher grades, also—at least in many cases—would appear to be the right method. But, of course, it is not for me to attempt a classification of the offices of the Government, or to show precisely how each class may be best arranged and dealt with. This is the business of experts. I only assert a general principle of wisdom and justice, leaving it to be applied whether in appointments, in promotions, or in dismissals—for by needful reduction of force, and in other ways, more or less employés are always liable to be dismissed or dropped—in accordance with judicious, well-considered rules, with the teaching of experience, and with a humane, equitable discretion. I do not believe in an iron-cast system, that attempts to reduce the whole matter to mathematical exactitude and completeness ; or in a mere beaurocracy, or cumbrous, harsh system of red-tape, that gives no play whatever to the dictates of



common sense and the generous instincts of our nobler nature.

Meanwhile, the principle itself—that of promotion for merit—is most reasonable and salutary. It calls into exercise some of the strongest and worthiest sentiments of our nature. Everybody knows what power it has in the army and navy. Inspired by it, how willingly the brave soldier will face the cannon's mouth or stand in the imminent, deadly breach! Everybody knows what power it has in all the spheres of human exertion. If long and faithful work is to be of no account in the way of advancement to a higher grade, one of the most effective motives to faithful work is paralyzed. And if the skill, knack, prompt and easy execution, power of inspiring confidence, and other advantages, that grow out of intelligent experience, are to be of little or no account in the way of advancement to higher grades, then one of the great laws of nature and Providence is trampled under-foot. Merit, then—especially merit combined with experience and length of service—is the proper ground of promotion. It is a principle of the divine government; and it will be recognized as a righteous principle in every well-ordered human government. *His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.*

(d). *Tenure of office during the full and meritorious performance of its duties.* This follows from the principles already laid down. I do not stop now to discuss exceptions to the rule, as I have not stopped to discuss possible exceptions to the rule of equal opportunity. There are, very likely, more or less



offices throughout the country, where a competitive examination, for example, would be out of place—the position of a village postmaster may be one of this class—and so there are, perhaps, cases where it would be wise expressly to restrict the term. What I contend for, is the principle of tenure during efficient and exemplary performance of duty, unless there is something in the nature of the office, or of the service, to render this inexpedient ; and the instant exceptional cases are known, every applicant or appointee understands just what to expect. In reference to this point, Gov. Hayes, in his letter of acceptance, states clearly what seems to me to be the right view :

“We should return to the principles and practice of the founders of the Government, supplying by legislation, when needed, that which was formerly the established custom. They neither expected nor desired from the public officers any partisan service. They meant that public officers should give their whole service to the Government and to the people. They meant *that the officer should be secure in his tenure as long as his personal character remained untarnished and the performance of his duties satisfactory*. If elected, I shall conduct the administration of the Government upon these principles, and all constitutional powers vested in the Executive will be employed to establish this reform.”

This point is assailed with special vehemence by the advocates of the present system. It is, they say, unrepresentative and aristocratic, as well as unfair and unwise ; in fine, a very objectionable provision. But why so ? It was, as we have seen, the almost unvarying practice of the country for forty years ; it is in strict accordance with the principle upon which the national army and navy are organized ; it is dictated

alike by reason and common sense; the experience of the most enlightened governments attests its soundness; the advanced political thinkers of the day assert that it is indispensable to good and efficient administration; why, then, should it be called aristocratic and unrepublican? Is it any more so, is it so in any other sense, than law and order, official responsibility, or the swift condign punishment of speculators and defaulters and swindlers? Was not Washington a good republican? Was Jefferson an aristocrat? Did not Madison and John Adams and Monroe and John Quincy Adams understand the true requirements of American liberty?

“But even these great men (it is said in reply) were not infallible. We believe in progress and hold it to have been a real step forward, when the principle of *rotation in office* was substituted for the virtual life-tenure of earlier times. Everybody admits that the true genius of our American democracy is, in some respects, better understood, because more fully developed, than it was at the beginning of the century. Now we contend that rotation in office is a genuine democratic development. Is it not, in fact, virtually contained in the Constitution itself—which limits the terms of the President and the Vice-President to four years? And is it not an old unwritten law of the land, that no man shall occupy the office of Chief Magistrate more than eight years? Are not Senators chosen for six years, and Representatives for two years? Are not our Governors all elected for one, two, three or four years? And has not this system of short terms and frequent elections always been defended on the ground, that it is a good thing to have

the public offices filled by men 'fresh from the people?' Has not rotation in office, under the name of 'rotary eldership,' lately fought its way to a place in the constitution of one of our most influential and conservative ecclesiastical bodies, as a fairer exponent of its polity than the old life-tenure?"

In reply to all this it is enough to say, that the change in the term of office of a Presbyterian elder is left purely optional with each congregation, and was based mainly upon his representative character; and as to the constitutional limitation of the terms of service of the President and Vice-President and of members of Congress, that it rests upon certain general principles of our political system, which do not apply, at all, to the merely ministerial and clerical service of the Government; further, that the "inferior officers" of the United States, whose tenure, as I contend, should be during good conduct and faithful performance of duty, have no representative character whatever, unless in the sense that they represent the principles of republican honesty, diligence, and hard work; there is no more need, therefore, that they should be "fresh from the people," than that a United States judge, or the superintendent of the military academy, or a captain in the navy, should be "fresh from the people" in order to fulfill his office in the best manner. We must not confound things so utterly different. The reason for limiting the Executive term to four years, was not to give more men a chance to become President of the United States—what, I pray, does it matter to the American people, whether, during a generation, two or three more individuals, or whether two or three less sit in

the Presidential chair?—the reason was founded in weighty considerations of public policy. Had the framers of the Constitution and the people of the United States believed that a President during good behavior, would be, on the whole, better than a President every four years, they would not have hesitated an instant so to arrange and ordain it.

Even in its own proper sphere there is, I believe, a growing sentiment that “rotation” has been carried to a most unwise and hurtful extreme; and that the government and legislation of the country, both in State and Union, would be greatly improved if there was far less rotating in and out, and a great deal more stability of political character, skill, and experience in the public councils. At all events, there is no good reason why a subordinate officer of the Government, who is doing his duty steadily and learning to do it better every year, should be turned out, merely to let some one else try his unskilled hand and share the emoluments.

(c). *Vigilant and impartial discipline.* This, too, is a vital condition of successful reform. The sinecurists, drones, and incompetents must be weeded out, and kept out, no matter whose fathers, sons, brothers, or other near relatives they may be, no matter who are their patrons. Business is business—more especially business which, like that of the General Government, affects the interests and peace of forty millions of people—and it should be conducted on the principle of obedience to law and authority, clock-like regularity, strict accountability, entire devotion to the public good, and respectful, considerate behavior in all its agents and employés, as well as on the principle

of justice, order, promptitude, and the public convenience in all its arrangements and details. Nothing pleases the people more than a diligent, conscientious, capable, ready, and courteous public officer—for he is doing *their* work, as well as that of the Government. And nothing irritates and disgusts the people more than a slack-handed, careless, dilatory, and ill-mannered public officer—for they feel that he is dishonoring and wronging *them*, as well as their country. Let those, therefore, who have at heart a thorough reform of the civil service, take special pains to have vigilant and impartial discipline, a discipline including manners, as well as morals and efficient work, made part and parcel of the new system.

(f). *Kindly provision for retiring the worn-out or superannuated officer on a moderate stipend.* An arrangement of this sort, either by a fund accumulated for the purpose or in some other way, while eminently right and fitting, would also well become a great and wealthy Government like ours. Such treatment of good and faithful servants, who have spent their years and strength in its service, would do honor to republican institutions, the world over. I know it is not according to our traditions, or what is supposed to be the spirit of our system, to lavish money profusely upon even our most distinguished public benefactors. But a moderate provision for those superannuated or broken down in doing its work, would, surely, be in admirable harmony with the popular genius of the Government and with its long practice in other branches of the public service, as also with the claims of common justice and humanity.

## XXI.

## OTHER CONDITIONS OF A SUCCESSFUL AND PERMANENT REFORM.

It would be a grave mistake to suppose, that a genuine and enduring reform of our civil service depends merely, or mainly, upon the adoption of wise rules and regulations. These are highly important ; but they are not even half the battle. Still other conditions are indispensable. Let me mention some of them.

(a). First of all, then, it will require the utmost exertion of Executive power to put in practice the wisest rules and regulations; it would be so if they were revealed directly from heaven, as the best rules and regulations possible. Neither the spoils system nor its devotees will yield to anything but power, pure and simple ; and there is no earthly power great enough to put them down but that vested by the Constitution and laws of the land in the President of the United States. The same hand that first wrought the mischief, must bring relief. The President alone can nominate ; and by the decision of the first Congress, he alone can remove. The initiative, therefore, is with him in this whole matter ; and if in the interest of a thorough renovation of the civil service, he choose to exert all his constitutional and legal prerogatives as earnestly as they have been used for nearly half a century in the interest of party, there is little doubt that he can, at least, fairly inaugurate a return to the principles and practice of the founders of the Republic. And this alone would be a work



worthy of any patriot's or statesman's ambition. It would be a work worthy of Washington himself. Fortunately, he would have at the start some special advantages—a strong *purchase*, in fact—in the way of statutory provision. Old laws which have fallen into neglect or never been fully carried out, contain, sometimes, a grant of power of most excellent use, when the right man to wield it fills the Executive chair. Section 1753 of the Revised Statutes of the United States contains such a law, passed in 1871. It is as follows :

“The President is authorized to prescribe such regulations for the admission of persons into the civil service of the United States as may best promote the efficiency thereof, and ascertain the fitness of each candidate in respect to age, health, character, knowledge, and ability for the branch of service into which he seeks to enter ; and for this purpose he may employ suitable persons to conduct such inquiries, and may prescribe their duties and establish regulations for the conduct of the persons who may receive appointments in the civil service.”

This is a very comprehensive provision, and will greatly aid the President, who shall enter upon the work of putting down the spoils system with full purpose of heart. There is dormant in it immense reforming power ; only it will require the prudence, sagacity, tact, and firm, steady hand of a genuine ruler and statesman, to waken that dormant power into beneficent life and action.

There is still another law, dating as far back as 1853, which is decidedly in the interest of civil service reform—at least in the departments at Washington. It will be found in sections 163 and 164 of the Revised Statutes of the United States, and is as follows :

“SEC. 163. The clerks in the departments shall be arranged



into four classes, distinguished as the first, second, third, and fourth classes.

"SEC. 164. No clerk shall be appointed in any department in either of the four classes above designated until he has been examined and found qualified by a board of three examiners, to consist of the chief of the bureau or office into which such clerk is to be appointed, and two other clerks to be selected by the head of the department."

These provisions have been at times, I believe, partially followed in the Treasury Department; but otherwise have remained, it is said, a dead letter.

Armed with the special power contained in these statutes, and with the general Executive power vested in him by the Constitution of the United States, a President bent upon civil service reform, and choosing his Cabinet with a view to its promotion, would be able, in the space of four years, even without the aid of further legislation, to accomplish a vast deal in the right direction. The many abuses of Federal patronage in the past might thus be turned into instruments of rightcousness. A power highly dangerous in itself may prove, in a great exigency and in wise, patriotic hands, full of saving health and benediction.

(*b*). But it would be little short of a miracle, if true civil service reform should be established and get rooted as the national policy without further legislation. No President will prosecute this herculean task without a profound conviction that it is vitally important to the best interests of the country; and no wise President, therefore, will undertake it without soliciting, on this ground, the earnest coöperation of the national Legislature. He is required, indeed, by his oath of office to "give to the Congress informa-

tion of the state of the Union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." No words could more happily describe right and wise measures of civil service reform. Such measures concern the state of the Union in reference to its moral life, and are, in a very eminent sense, both "necessary and expedient." And it is to be presumed that such an Executive appeal to the law-givers of the nation would not be in vain. There are among them, it can not be denied, too many mere self-seeking politicians; but there are also among them, in both parties, politicians of a better class, who mean, on the whole, to do what is best for their country; and there are some real, high-minded statesmen—men, who look before and after, and would scorn to oppose measures which their conscience and judgment approved, on any narrow personal or partisan ground. It is to be remembered, moreover, that both of the great parties of the country are deeply committed by their platforms, and the utterances of their leaders, to the principle, if not to specific measures, of reform. I have already quoted from the letter of acceptance of Gov. Hayes. Gov. Tilden has also expressed himself emphatically on the subject: "The question of honest administration (such is his language) and the question of securing official accountability are the great questions of the future." It would require a volume to cite all the varied declarations of the Republican party in denunciation of the present system. The following is a resolution of the Democratic party, assembled in their national Convention:

"That the civil service of the Government has become a mere

instrument of partisan tyranny and ambition, and an object of selfish greed. It is a scandal and reproach upon free institutions, and breeds a demoralization dangerous to the prosperity of republican government. We, therefore, regard a thorough reform of the civil service as one of the most pressing necessities of the hour."

Hypocrisy, I know, is a bosom-sin, and deceiving the people one of the fine-arts, of our party politics. None throw up their caps at the noble and statesmanlike sentiments that so much abound in political platforms, more enthusiastically than wire-pulling office-holders and managers. The delight and unction with which they roll the patriotic, and especially the reforming, resolutions, like a sweet morsel, under their tongues, is something marvelous. Not because they really like the taste of such resolutions, but because they like to think how beautifully fitted they are to tickle and delude the public.

And yet I find it hard to believe that the solemn and oft-repeated declarations of both parties, are not sincerely approved of by the great body of the people; or that a goodly number of their Senators and Representatives in Congress, would not coöperate with the President in a reform, which they profess to regard as so expedient and so necessary.

As to the legislation most appropriate to the end in view, differences of opinion will, of course, exist. Some think a constitutional amendment indispensable; at least, a reversal of the constitutional construction of the Congress of 1789, giving the power of removal to the President alone. Mr. Webster and Mr. Calhoun, as we have seen, regarded that decision as a fountain of evil; and yet they were not ready to propose its

reversal. My own mind inclines to the view, that it has already wrought its worst mischief and that wise legislation can now reach the seat of the trouble as effectually, perhaps, as would a constitutional amendment, or a new construction respecting the power of removal. The Senate is no longer the body it once was. It is composed, in larger measure, of an inferior class of politicians. It does not represent and embody the pure, high-minded, conservative, and independent statesmanship, or the intellectual and moral power, of the country, as it did in former days. The old order of civilians, trained in the times that tried men's souls, or in the age next following, are all gone; and but few altogether like them have taken their places. Fifty years ago the cry was, that Executive patronage was going to corrupt the nation and overthrow republican liberty; and the Senate was called upon to prevent the catastrophe. Forty years ago the burden of complaint was, that Executive patronage had corrupted the nation, by fastening upon it the tyrannical, odious spoils system; and the Senate, which had bravely resisted the revolutionary policy, was also loudest in denouncing it. But for years past the Senate of the United States has been itself the strong citadel of this monstrous abuse. Its members have gradually usurped and absorbed so large a portion of the Federal patronage, that when they meet as an executive body, to act upon the President's nominations, they are, to all intents and purposes, in a majority of cases, acting upon their own individual nominations, are advising themselves, and consenting with each other to their own appointments. The President is simply their agent and tool in the

matter. It seems to me, therefore, a serious question whether, all things considered, the joint exercise by the Senate of the removing as well as the appointing power, is now a thing to be desired.

Certainly, if it were left for me to choose, either to give the Senate this power, or to *repeal the Four Years' law of 1820*, in the interest of Civil Service Reform I should hardly hesitate, as the case now presents itself, to choose the latter. My impression is that the tenure of office law—which, as I have said before, was passed largely in the interest of the Republican party—may yet be found to thwart rather than further the restoration of the Federal patronage to its original design and purity.

No radical and complete reform in the civil service will be safe, while the law of 1820 continues in force. That law is itself in direct conflict with such a reform, and so long as it stands upon the national statute-book, it will contain the same potent elements of mischief which have wrought so disastrously in the past. Mr. Calhoun felt this, when, immediately after its passage, he declared that it was most dangerous and would work a great revolution. He saw this when, fifteen years later, he introduced into the Senate a bill to repeal it. Mr. Webster saw this, when he urged the repeal in one of his weightiest speeches. The Senate of the United States—then in its most palmy days—clearly saw this when, after long debate, it passed Mr. Calhoun's bill by a vote of 31 to 16. Whether exactly this bill, in what it substitutes in place of the Four Years' law, should be enacted, or whether something still more decided and comprehensive is now needed, I will not stop to inquire.

What legislation is still required and would be best fitted to secure and render permanent the reform, conforming it to the spirit of our institutions and the lessons of experience, while guarding it well against a new class of abuses—this, of course, is a problem of patriotic, senseful, and discerning statesmanship.

But let no one fancy that a large portion of the offices of the country can become vacant every four years—thousands of them almost at the moment of the inauguration of a new President—and Civil Service Reform endure the shock. So long as the new President and his party are in full sympathy with it, the reform may stand; but nobody can foretell how soon a President may be elected whose heart is hardened against it, and who, under the overwhelming pressure of party animosity, party greed, and personal pledges, will yield up the citadel to the old enemy. Then how quickly would the strongest supports of the new policy be swept out of existence; even as the Mill River dam was swept away under the pressure of the accumulated, angry waters!

(c). But neither Executive power nor wise legislation is enough. To secure the full and enduring triumph of this reform, the American people must take it in hand, for it is their cause; just as in the days of our Revolutionary fathers, liberty and independence were the people's cause; just as the war for the Union and the overthrow of slavery were the people's cause. It is, I say, the people's cause; and in order to succeed, it must become enthroned in the popular mind and conscience. It must become a solemn *fiat* of the popular will. Then, and not till then, the party politicians will fall into line and keep



step to the new music. All true patriots, therefore, especially the more thoughtful and influential classes, should be willing to devote any amount of time and effort and money to the furtherance of the object, as a high and imperative civic duty. The press and the platform should be subsidized in its behalf. Nor should the pulpit keep silence. Tracts addressed to the plain people, explaining to them the whole matter, with pointed facts and illustrations, should be prepared and circulated far and wide. Liberal prizes should be offered for the best essays upon the more difficult points. No stone should be left unturned in order to interest, enlighten, convince, and stir up the popular mind on the subject. *Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.* The practicability of reform has already been tested. Local attempts have been made, with the best results—results fitted to make a strong impression upon the common sense and right feeling of the people. In the post-office of this city, for example, a silent revolution has been going on ever since Mr. James took charge of it. I recently made inquiries on the subject of the superintendent of my own branch station, and received the following reply :

NEW YORK, *February 23, 1877.*

*Dear Sir :* In reply to your favor, I would state that I have been in the service of the New York Post-office nearly fourteen years. During this period I have passed through the several grades, having been first a carrier, then a clerk, and for the last nine years the superintendent of a branch station. I have had an opportunity, therefore, to observe minutely the working of the system under both the old and the new regime. By the old regime, I mean the running of the post-office in the interest of



party politics. There was a time when all the appointments for this station were dictated by the local managers; and to all intents and purposes, it was their concern. The appointees, aware of this fact, and remembering to whom they owed their places, naturally depended upon giving satisfaction to their political patrons, rather than upon intelligent and faithful work, for retaining their positions. The result was what you would expect. The men without principle and without capacity—and too many of the appointees were of this sort—soon became careless and indolent; they performed their duties negligently; they fell into bad habits; they were sometimes guilty of serious offenses; and yet they were virtually independent of the superintendent. If he undertook to call them to account and to inflict penalties for violating the rules and regulations of the department, he found his hands tied, and his reproofs and attempts at discipline treated with utter indifference, if not with contempt. They had only to report to their ‘backers,’ giving their own version of the trouble, and the chances were rather in favor of the removal of the superintendent himself, on false charges, than of their losing their places for neglect of duty. It is easy to see what all this led to—namely, an irregular, insecure, and annoying service, in which the public were the chief sufferers. Serving the public well was not the title by which the employé got and held his place.

In pleasant contrast with all this is the system of appointments and dismissals in the branch office referred to, introduced by the present postmaster. There is an entire difference in the whole manner and method of conducting the business. No political or other backing avails any one, who for lack of inclination or ability fails to do the work required of him. Each man has now a check upon the service performed by him, and is held strictly responsible for any error or omission in the line of his duty. The natural effect of this has been to encourage and stimulate the worthy to do their very best, as diligence and fidelity are now a better recommendation than any political ‘backing’ gave them under the old regime. This constant striving for excellence in their different departments has brought the force to a degree of efficiency hardly to be believed, when compared with the unsatisfactory and loose methods of the old plan. Then the ability of a man was frequently rendered almost useless by

his bad habits. Now every man has a check upon his actions, as well as upon his performance of the duties assigned him ; and any deviation from the rules of sobriety and good behavior meets with merited punishment, irrespective of party leaders or local managers.

The business of the carriers, clerks, etc., of a branch post-office station brings them into close and continuous—you might almost say, confidential—relations and contact with the general public ; aside, therefore, from capacity for mere routine work, the mental caliber, as well as character and manners, of the employés, becomes a most important consideration. The public has now been so well educated on the subject, and is accustomed to such a degree of promptitude and accuracy in the service, that a return to the former system would hardly be tolerated.

Most respectfully yours,

THEODORE KARNER,

*Superintendent Branch H.*

REV. DR. PRENTISS.

Can anybody doubt whether or not an enlightened popular opinion will approve such a change as this all over the country, and in every department of the public service ?

Such appear to me to be some of the leading and most vital points in the matter of Civil Service Reform.

#### CONCLUSION.

Since this paper was begun, the Electoral Commission has been appointed and scenes of an extraordinary and most exciting character have been passing before the gaze of the American people. But the American people themselves have not, for an instant, lost their mental or moral equipoise and self-possession ; nor have there been idle lookers-on. I can not but think they have marked, learned, and will

inwardly digest the solemn and momentous lessons of the hour; and that, in due time, these lessons will reappear as the expression of their sovereign, ordaining will, in the Constitution and laws of the land. Meanwhile, the events of the past few weeks have not weakened, certainly, the positions I have tried to maintain; on the contrary, they have illustrated in a very striking way, as it seems to me, the extent and the accursed effects of the dry-rot in American politics. In conclusion, then, I repeat, that, since the overthrow of slavery, a wise, comprehensive, and thorough civil service reform is what the country needs more than anything else, and what would bring with it incalculable social reliefs and public benefits. But it is a work whose accomplishment will require not only a President of the greatest firmness, courage, wisdom, and patriotism, but will require also the utmost strength, intelligence, and persistent energy of public opinion, backed by all the moral forces of the nation. Even then the special favor of Almighty Providence alone will be potent enough to give a final and complete victory. And so may it please the God of our fathers to purify, bless, and save the Republic!

NEW YORK, *March 1*, 1877.

## XXII.

THE NEW ADMINISTRATION:—IS IT THE DAWN OF  
A NEW ERA?

Since these closing sentences were penned, a great change has come over the spirit of the country. The

first of March seems very far back in the past. The hard-fought struggle is over. A new President has been inaugurated as peacefully as if he had been declared elected by one hundred majority of the Electoral votes, instead of a majority of one. To the defeated party the result has very naturally brought the bitterest disappointment, coupled with a strong assertion of its injustice; but there has been no attempt to set it aside. The whole matter was submitted, fairly and squarely, to the arbitrament of the Electoral Commission; and it would have been an indelible stigma upon the country's honor, if their verdict had not ended the perilous strife. Few events, probably, in our political history will hereafter be regarded as more creditable to the good sense and "sober second thought" of the American people. The title of the new President to his great office is clear and unimpeachable; but it is none the less a title won under circumstances in the highest degree trying, and fitted, one should think, to inspire him with an unusually vivid feeling of his responsibility to the whole country and to all the people. If we may judge by his brief Inaugural, by the Cabinet he has chosen, and by his whole tone and demeanor thus far, it is evident that he feels deeply the heavy pressure of this responsibility. Whatever errors he may commit—and were he a second Washington, or another Lincoln, he would still be an erring mortal—we may be pretty sure they will be errors of judgment and not of temper or intention. About his Southern policy, it is not strange that there should be a good deal of sensitiveness and serious diversity of opinion as well. Doubtless, he himself has felt its peculiar embarrass-

ments more keenly than anybody else. To abandon a mistaken policy, which has become thoroughly entangled in party opinions, party passions, and supposed party interests, as also with many personal and political fortunes, and is supported still by honest and patriotic men—even after its utter failure has been demonstrated — this requires uncommon firmness, patience, and willingness to be, for a time, misunderstood alike by friends and foes. Certainly, the leading principle of President Hayes' so-called Southern policy was plainly asserted in his speeches in 1875 and in his letter of acceptance. And that principle is, undeniably, a genuine American idea and a vital element of American constitutional liberty. Let us hope that, in spite of all fears or temporary appearances to the contrary, it will, in due time, justify both itself and the President by its healing and peaceable fruits.

But I refer to this subject chiefly on account of its bearing upon the great question of civil service reform. Since the close of the war, Federal patronage, it is notorious, has been largely dispensed at the South in a way to occasion much scandal, and to bring reproach and contempt, as well as relentless hostility, upon the party in power. And it is difficult to see how all this could be avoided in the future, should the old system of patronage, as an engine of personal and party influence, be continued. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles. A corrupt tree can not bring forth good fruit. I do not see how Mr. Hayes could, possibly, carry out his pledges in favor of a radical and complete reform of the civil service, without abandoning, root and

branch, the old Southern policy. And yet stern fidelity to these pledges is a matter of life and death to his political honor. He can not prove faithless to them without virtual perjury; for by them he discards utterly the pernicious notion that what is called Executive patronage, is a personal prerogative to be exercised according to his own caprice or self-will. He regards the patronage of his office, on the contrary, as a solemn trust committed to him by the American people, and holds himself bound by his constitutional oath to dispense it solely in the interest of the Government and for the general good.

That he really means to keep these pledges, and employ all constitutional powers vested in the Executive to establish this reform, is a political event as astonishing as it is full of hope and good omen. It is hard to orient ourselves, to tell just where we are, in the presence of such a strange phenomenon.

Why, 'tis the rarest argument of wonder that hath shot out in our latter times.

Has our new President been in communication with the spirits of Washington, old John and John Quincy Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe? Or, has he been taking counsel of the spirits of Webster, Clay, and Calhoun? What is the matter with him, that he thinks himself obliged to turn a deaf ear to the loud warnings and entreaties of so many shrewd political soothsayers, and to listen instead to the still, small voice of his own conscience, to the approving voice of the American people, and to those "deep, prophetic bodements" of Christian wisdom and statesmanship, which

By the power of the informing word,  
Roll sounding onward through a thousand years?



Nor is this the only puzzle of the hour. Other strange things have happened, and keep happening almost every day. Look at the Cabinet. One of its members a Southern Democrat and an ex-Confederate officer! And not a man was put into it, apparently, in accordance with a previous bargain, or on account of his "claims," or in compliance with the wishes of strong State "delegations," or at the dictation of some mighty party chieftain. The President actually selected his own confidential advisers! But this is not the most surprising thing he has done. While insisting upon his own constitutional right and duty of free speech, choice, and action, he concedes the same right to others! And he does not sulk or use harsh, angry words, or stand, offended, upon his dignity, when, in the exercise of it, they see fit to sharply criticise, or oppose, him and his policy. *A soft answer turneth away wrath*, and he seems to understand it, as also the wisdom of making haste slowly. He has obviously got hold of a secret of public influence, which too many American politicians are utterly ignorant of—I mean, manly simplicity and sincerity. The real, sensible people delight to see these qualities reflected in the language and acts of one in high position, even as they despise pretentious noise and bluster and double-dealing, whether in high or low. It really looks as if a new era were dawning—an era in which patriotic wisdom and good sense, instead of selfish partisanship, will be in the ascendant. How large a portion of the people of the United States would heartily rejoice to have it so! I do not believe a political millennium is at hand. Both Republicans and Democrats will take care to prevent that. We



shall still have parties, old and new, and a great deal too much of party passion, prejudice, and folly. But unless many signs fail, we have reason to anticipate an early and substantial improvement in several important directions, more especially in that of civil service reform.\*

The position of the press is, on the whole, exceedingly favorable to this reform. The most influential dailies and weeklies—those great organs, as well as guides and teachers, of public opinion—are outspoken and unwearied in its support. And so too are some of the leading statesmen of the Union. Even since these lines were written, my eye has fallen upon a letter of Mr. Hill, the new Senator from Georgia, in which he expresses himself on this subject with singular force and plainness of speech. His letter is itself

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\* A friend has put into my hands the Reports of the Civil Service Commission, made to the President in 1871 and 1874, together with Mr. D. B. Eaton's paper, entitled "The Experiment of Civil Service Reform in the United States," read before the American Social Science Association, at Detroit, May, 1875. Whoever wishes to become thoroughly informed with regard to the history, grounds, theory, methods, and results of Civil Service Reform under President Grant, as also the excuses and responsibility for its abandonment, should, by all means, acquaint himself with these very able and instructive documents. They throw a flood of light upon the whole subject, and reflect lasting honor upon the patriotic zeal and labors of Mr. Curtis, Mr. Eaton, and their associates on the Commission. Had I read them before preparing this paper, I might have written much more to the point. It appears, from the Report of 1871, that the office-seeking mania had begun to show itself, with no little violence, years before the spoils system came into vogue. "The Joint Congressional Committee upon Retrenchment reported, in 1868, that having consulted all accessible means of information, they had not learned of a single removal

a remarkable and most auspicious sign of the times. I can not forbear quoting some of his trenchant, statesmanlike utterances. Having declined to "make recommendation for office—especially for offices to be passed upon the Senate," he thus assigns a reason for his course :

The Senate is clothed with certain executive functions and duties. It is, in this respect, the advisory body of the President. But advisory, how? Is a Senator to advise the President whom he, the Senator, would like to have nominated? Is he not rather to advise the President whether nominations made are of fit and proper persons for the offices designated?

This advisory position is a public trust. Each Senator is a trustee, not for himself, nor for his friends, nor against his enemies, but for the public good. The Senator represents the whole State and every citizen in the State. Every citizen is entitled to have that representation fair, equal, and impartial. When a

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of a subordinate officer, except for cause, from the beginning of Washington's administration to the close of that of John Quincy Adams." And yet the pressure to remove was, as Jefferson said, like a torrent. When by the death of an incumbent a vacancy actually occurred, inasmuch as it was filled—not by any fixed rule or competition, but according to the mere pleasure of the Executive—the struggle for the office was vehement. When an auditorship of the Treasury became vacant under President Monroe, it is stated that among the applicants were five United States Senators and thirty Representatives in Congress. In 1828 Mr. Van Buren said that "The Chief Justice of the proudest and largest State was a candidate for a place in the Treasury Department to which none but third-rate men would aspire."

The Report of 1874 contains a mass of facts and testimonies in favor of the general principles of the reform, as thus far tested by actual trial; and shows also, by citing the resolutions of their national and State conventions, how unequivocally and emphatically all parties—Republicans, Democrats, and Liberals—have approved of it and pledged themselves to its support.

Senator selects one applicant for an office, and represents that one, he becomes partial for that one, and partial against all others. He abdicates his office of trustee for all, and becomes the attorney for one, and, as experience sadly shows, too often for a consideration in some form; and any consideration which induces such partiality is quite as bad, morally, as a consideration in money. Each applicant for an office is entitled to an impartial consideration of his merits for the office sought, and he is entitled, not only to that impartial judgment of his Senator, but also to impartial information from his Senator as an adviser of all others who are to pass on the application. When the Senator becomes the advocate for one applicant, he, by that act, disqualifies himself both as a judge and an adviser upon the merits of all other applicants.

In my opinion, a Senator has no more right to select one of a number of applicants for office, and use the influence of his position to give that applicant success, than a judge on the bench has the right to select one litigant in his court and use all the powers of his judicial position to secure success for that litigant.

No man can be fonder of his friends than myself. No man can be more gratified when his friends succeed under a fair and impartial consideration of their merits. But I esteem the public good, and my own duties as a public servant to promote the public good, far before all personalities or obligations. If I were to use a public office to gratify private friendships, or to avenge private wrongs, or to promote, in any way, my private or political interests, I should feel that I had become guilty of a gross breach of trust, for which the proper penalty would be disqualification to hold any public office whatever. . . . If I were called to designate the crime of all crimes in this generation, I would say it is personalism in Government—by which I mean the use of the offices of Government to promote personal interests and ambitions. Three-fourths of the evils that now curse the country, and nearly all the perils that have threatened the Government, have sprung from this great crime.

*There are men—noisy men, too—in both the Senate and House at Washington, whose only idea of the science of government is defined by the art of controlling the public patronage as*

*a means of holding power. They form rings, make combinations, organize cliques, and in some instances absolutely control large States. They get their tools in nearly all the departments of the Government at Washington, and in the States, and each tool regards it as his sacred duty to keep the public supplied with puffs of the noble deeds and great eloquence of his benefactor.*

*Thousands of offices have been made solely to provide places for friends of members of Congress. Millions of money are levied in taxes upon the people annually to feed these supple servants of some of our great men. The President often finds himself denounced, or his nominations opposed, solely because they do not suit the purposes of these ring chiefs in Congress.*

The large crowd of carpet-baggers that were sent South a few years ago, were the mere tools of leading men who desired, through their tools, to get control of the Southern States for their own advancement. And there are men now in the Senate making themselves most gallant defenders of those who linger to annoy our people and disgust all good men, solely because they hope, through these few who remain here, to get delegations to suit them in the next nominating Republican convention.

The offices of the country, too, are filled with mere politicians ready to serve their masters, instead of with men of business experience and qualifications. . . .

How can we ever expect to elevate the statesmanship of the country, reform abuses, and nationalize our politics, if even the high position of Senator is to be degraded to an agency for office-seekers and general political jobbery?

Even if the foregoing reasons were not sufficient to justify the conclusions announced in the above telegram, I am frank to confess that, with my limited abilities, I am not able to discharge the higher duties of the Senatorship, if I give my time to the business of procuring offices.

The proper rule is for applicants to forward their applications for office directly to the appointing power. Every applicant from Georgia has the right in his application to refer to me, or any other Senator or Representative, for information touching his fitness for the office sought. I will cheerfully and honestly give such information as I possess to the President, if asked, before the nomination, and to the Senate in passing on the nomination.

Before the President and the Senate every man shall have from me an equal chance on his merits. . . .

If we would avoid a continuance of the evils that have cursed us in the past, we must abandon the causes that produced them. If we would elevate our politics, we must improve the ways of our politicians. If we would relieve the burdens of the people, we must sustain honesty to government. We must have no office that is not needed, and no officer that is not competent.

When such sentiments as these inspire the Executive of the nation and bear sway in the Senate of the United States, the Federal patronage will be restored to its original purity, and the reproach of the spoils system will pass away. And may we not hope that many Southern Senators—following in the footsteps of the old, canonized leader of the South, Mr. Calhoun—will come up to the help of the President and of their country in this great struggle? It will be a sore disappointment to thousands at the North, if such men as Mr. Bayard, the eminent Senator from Delaware; Gen. Gordon, the other Senator from Georgia; Gen. Morgan, the new Senator from Alabama, whose opening speech won him so much honor; Mr. Lamar, of Mississippi, and Mr. Garland, of Arkansas—to name no others—do not array themselves on the side of a radical and complete reform.

I have already alluded to the revolution which has been quietly going on in the post-office of this city under Mr. James, and have given an account of its working in a branch station. The universal and hearty applause with which it has been greeted, is clear proof of its popularity. And there is no reason to doubt, that so far as the people of New York, in distinction from the mere politicians, are concerned, they would hail a similar revolution in

the custom-house with equal satisfaction. How could it be otherwise, after their experience of the reform in the post-office, and, on the other hand, their repeated experience, in the persons of some of our most worthy and honored citizens, of the flagitious abuses connected, in late years, with the custom-house?

It is said that Gen. Dix, while at the head of the New York post-office, under President Buchanan, instituted some salutary reforms, with a view of severing it from political control, and placing it on a purely business footing. But higher duties soon called him elsewhere, and things returned to their old condition. To Mr. Thomas L. James the commercial metropolis is indebted for the present reform, and his example deserves both praise and imitation. As a fit accompaniment, therefore, of the extracts from Mr. Hill's letter, and as a practical illustration of some of the main positions of this tract, I give an article which appeared in *The New York Tribune*, of March 20th, entitled WHY THE POST-OFFICE IS EFFICIENT. On one or two points a question might be raised, but I will not stop now to raise it.

'The Post-office is a business institution and not a political machine,' said Postmaster James when asked by a *Tribune* reporter to give his idea of Civil Service Reform. A desire for information as to the manner in which civil service rules and business principles had been successfully applied to an office much coveted in the past by politicians for its use as an election machine, was gratified. 'We have adopted,' said the Postmaster, 'a few simple general principles or rules: First, no removals except for cause and after a fair and impartial trial—political reasons not being considered a "cause;" second, all vacancies by reason of death, resignation, or from removal for cause to be filled from the party controlling the National Administration. It is only



fair, I think, that whatever party is in control of the Government should have a representation in the office, but no removals should be made of capable men of one party affiliation to make room for applicants of another ; third, all appointments to be to the lowest grade of service, applicants to pass a standard examination (like that at West Point), not a competitive test ; all promotions to be made from a lower to a higher grade. Those are the general principles on which this office is conducted. Our examinations of applicants and quarterly tests of the capacity of the men employed are of a practical nature, with reference to the business they have to do. As a rule, we try to take into the service young men from 18 to 20 years old ; they are more teachable, active, endure more, and by the time they work up from the bottom, where they enter, to the higher positions, they are admirably fitted for their duties. Then we keep them during good behavior. We have about 40 old men, faithful fellows, who ought to be replaced by young men. They have served a long time and we can not turn them out. When our service is improved we shall have a pension roll and retire employé's when they reach a certain age on half pay. For promotions we apply a competitive test, examining men in a lower grade as to their knowledge of the work at which they are employed, and in the duties of the position to which an appointment is to be made. This rule applies unvaryingly, and develops the highest standard of fitness and capacity. In the superintendencies of stations there have been within my term three vacancies occasioned by death, and every one has been well filled by a competitive selection from the head clerks. In the last case so close was the race between two clerks that the person appointed was given the place only by reason of a longer term of service than his rival. Our men, too, have to keep continually striving for excellence to retain their places. They understand that their tenure of office depends on the performance of their duties. The quarterly examination of assorters of letters and distributors of papers may show that a man is getting slack and careless in his work, and he may have to go down a peg and give place to some bright young fellow who is working his way up. Rum is the great trouble with those who fail to keep their places. More than two-thirds of the removals in my term have been for indulgence in drink. It unfits the men



morally and physically, and in the Post-office service the latter is almost as important as the former. Our physical examinations of the carriers are as strict as for soldiers in the regular army.'

The best practical illustration of the consistent application of civil service principles in the management of the office, is to be found in Mr. James' selections of heads of departments. Henry G. Pearson, Assistant Postmaster ; James Gayler, Superintendent of City Delivery ; Anthony Yeomans, General Superintendent of the Distribution Department ; Charles Forrester, Jr., Superintendent of the Registered Letter Department, have all been in the Post-office service more than twenty years, and together with others holding important positions, have won their places by successive promotions from subordinate positions. The present superintendents of four branch offices began their work on the mails as carriers.

The civil service examinations in the office are conducted by a board consisting of Henry G. Pearson, Assistant Postmaster, James Gayler, Superintendent of City Delivery, and Thomas R. Bannerman, secretary to Postmaster James. They are all strongly in sympathy with Postmaster James as to the system of appointments and promotions, and not being subject to removal at the behest of politicians, they apply the tests of capacity alike to the 'favorite son' of the Republican Assembly District and the applicant who comes on his merits. One of Postmaster James' predecessors removed 300 old employ  s in a single month to make places for the candidates of politicians. Mr. James will complete four years of service next month without having made a removal for political reasons.

A simple statement like this is, of itself, a triumphant answer to some of the most plausible objections, that are made to civil service reform by rules and regulations. All other objections will give way before the demonstrations of experience. The common sense of the people will cordially respond to the common sense embodied in such a system, while their moral and patriotic feelings will be no less gratified

with the principles of fair dealing, equal rights, and loyalty to duty, by which it is animated. The people are liable to be deceived, and led astray for a while, by the fallacies and lies of partisan politics; they sometimes allow themselves to be fearfully imposed upon, even with regard to their own immediate and most vital interests; but they are not quite so childish or silly as not to know and appreciate the vast difference between a solid system of wise and efficient business arrangements, and a system based upon the selfish interests and ambition of a few scheming politicians. Nor ought we to doubt that the better class of our public men will, sooner or later, range themselves on the side of this reform. It has been so in Great Britain, and why should it not be so with us? As bearing on this point, let me cite the testimony of the ablest and most illustrious living statesman of England. In a speech delivered at Greenwich, in October, 1871, Mr. Gladstone used this impressive language :

“ It has been our happy lot, in almost every department of the State—I believe there are but two exceptions—to give up that which has always been considered the special patronage and the highly-prized patronage of a government, namely, the appointment of clerks to the civil offices of the country. We have abandoned that power; we have thrown every one of them open to public competition. The transition is now nearly complete, and, with regard to the future, I can say that, as to the clerkships in my own office—the office of the Treasury—every one of you have just as much power over their disposal as I have. . . . And in order that the public service might be, indeed, the public service; in order that we might not have among the civil officers of the State that which we had complained of in the army, namely, that the service was not the property of the nation, but of the officers, we have now been enabled to remove the barriers

of nomination, patronage, jobbing, favoritism in whatever form ; and every man belonging to the people of England, if he so pleases to fit his children for the position of competing for places in the public service, may do it entirely irrespective of the question, what is his condition in life, or the amount of means with which he may happen to be or not to be blessed."

Shall American statesmen be behind those of England in helping on a movement so entirely in the interest of the country and of republican equality? But, after all, this reform, as I have said already, is pre-eminently the people's cause, and to them it must look for its ultimate triumph. Without their intelligent and steadfast support, it is sure to fail. And the people will never give it such support; they will never insist upon a pure and righteous system of Government patronage until, in their own appointments to office, they learn to set the example and practise themselves what they demand of their public servants. The stream does not rise higher than its source. The spoils system is not solely the work of selfish politicians; it is also the bitter fruit of that criminal neglect—or that careless, unthinking, partisan performance—of civil duty, which is so common and crying an evil among us. How quickly could the people purify their government, if they would stop electing so many incompetent and corrupt men to take part in administering it! There are, no doubt, exceptions to the rule; but in the long run, and as a general fact, the executive and legislative departments of the government will fairly represent the dominant temper and habits of the people themselves. It is of infinite moment, therefore, that the people should be deeply sensible of their real responsibility in the choice of the national rulers and law-givers. They should feel it to

be, what indeed it is, the most solemn act and ordinance—the very sacrament, as it were—of republican self-government. All the blessings of our American constitutional liberty depend upon its wise and rightful exercise. By its wrongful, perverse exercise we may easily bring upon ourselves and our posterity some of the worst and most debasing evils that can afflict human society. Let me at once fortify and enforce this remark by citing, in conclusion, a passage from Edmund Burke, who, on at least some most vital points of political wisdom, is surpassed in moral depth and power by no other man that ever spoke our mother-tongue :

*When the people have emptied themselves of all the lust of selfish will, which without religion it is impossible they ever should, when they are conscious that they exercise, and exercise, perhaps, in a higher link of the order of delegation, the power, which to be legitimate must be according to that eternal, immutable law, in which will and reason are the same, they will be more careful how they place power in base and incapable hands. In their nomination to office, they will not appoint to the exercise of authority, as to a pitiful job, but as to a holy function ; not according to their sordid, selfish interest, nor to their wanton caprice, nor to their arbitrary will ; but they will confer that power (which any man may well tremble to give or receive) on those only, in whom they may discern that predominant proportion of active virtue and wisdom, taken together and fitted to the charge, such as in the great and inevitable mixed mass of human imperfections and infirmities, is to be found.*

I SPEAK AS TO WISE MEN ; JUDGE YE WHAT I SAY.











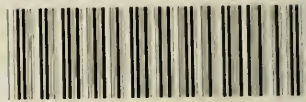


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